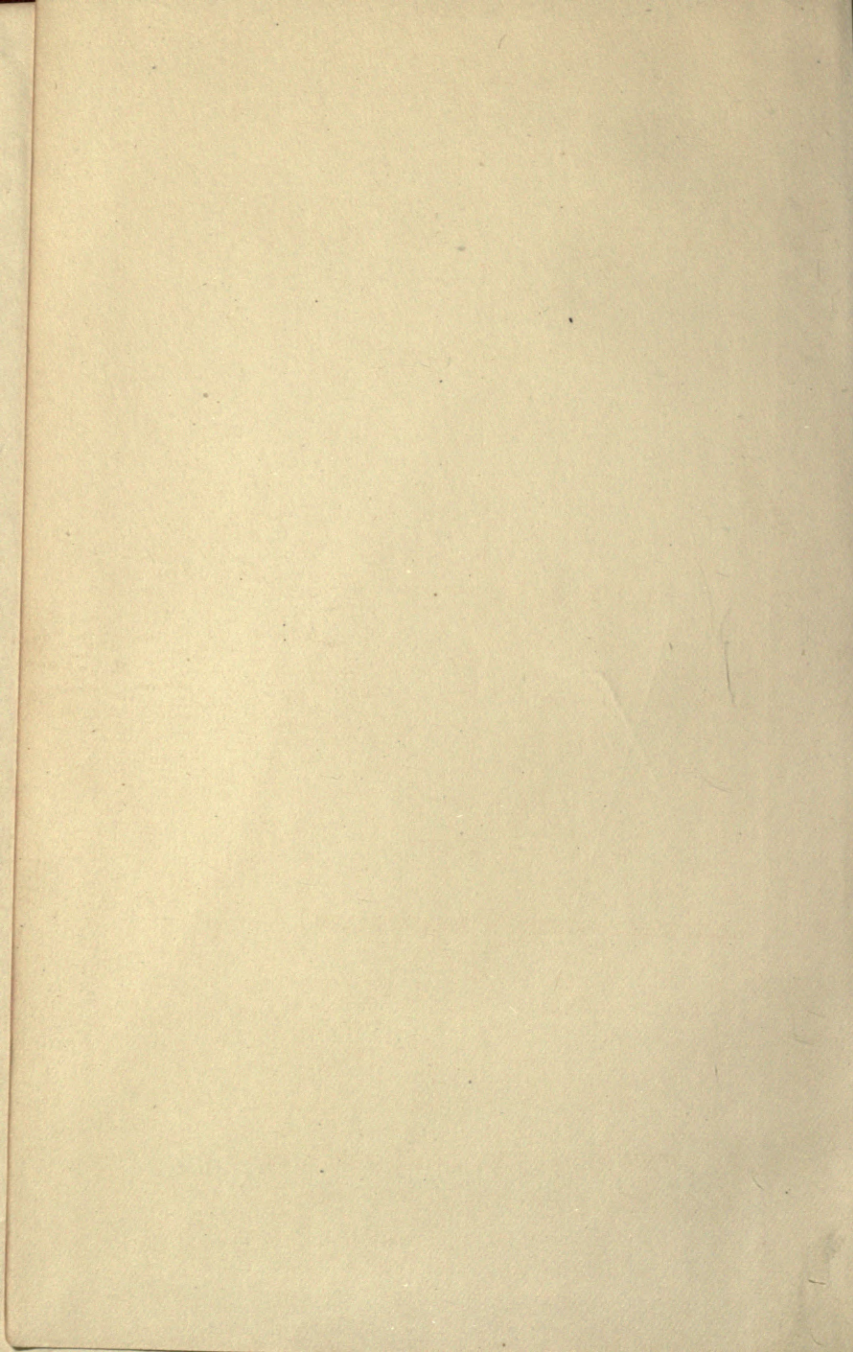


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THE
PRINCESS OF THE MOOR.

[DAS HAIDEPRINZESSCHEN.]

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AUTHORIZED EDITION.

A. L. BURT COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,
52-58 DUANE STREET, NEW YORK.

THE PRINCESS OF THE MOOR.

I.

THE tiny stream as it flows through the silent moor—how like is it to a solitary traveler! Its rippling waves know nothing of the fierce joy with which more stormy waters rush toward a valley, but dance gayly over the smooth stones and pebbles, which offer no resistance, between low banks of never-ending alder trees and willows. On either side the boughs have met and intertwined, till even the sky above can scarcely penetrate and discover this little stream, which like a vein courses with exuberant life throughout this despised country. Even so, on a larger scale, has many a false tongue misrepresented in the world at large these extensive plains of Northern Germany.

Friends, be persuaded just for once to pay a summer visit to the haide.*

It does not indeed rear its tall form toward the sky; the glowing diadem of the Alps or a crown of rhododendrons you will seek in vain; no crest of stone, as in the Nieder-gebirges, or broad sparkling stream circling her bosom like a cold steel chain will you find there; but the heather blooms, and with its bell-shaped blossoms of lilac and red casts a royal mantle of brilliant hues studded with myriads of golden bees over the soft undulations of the land.

Far in the distance extends the sandy plain from which the haide vegetation draws the scanty nourishment it requires; and the long dark line standing out against the horizon, in which the plain suddenly terminates, is a forest, a dense majestic mass of foliage such as you will rarely see equaled. A traveler might pass whole hours wan-

*Moor.

dering amid these stately columns which rear their heads to heaven; far above, in the blue ether, larks and thrushes tune their merry lay, while the timid deer gaze shyly from the neighboring thicket; and when the wanderer at last should reach the boundaries of the forest and emerge into the tamer groves of fir, his foot would linger, all reluctant to crush beneath it the wild berries thickly strewn on every side and adorning the sloping ground with rich hues of blue, black, and scarlet. In the valley opposite soft green meadows and golden corn-fields would meet his view; he would see the little village nestling in the midst, its old-fashioned dwellings clustered around the tiled church-tower; and when he listened to the sounds of life and activity and heard the lowing of the splendid cattle echoing through the air, the recollection of the "bleak, God-forgotten waste of sand [desert]" described by the guide-books would doubtless bring a smile to his lips.

I do not mean to deny that the little stream with whose description my story commences winds its quiet way for many a mile through barren desert soil, running parallel indeed with the forest boundary, but long before it takes a turn in its direction. Throughout its gentle course, however, it washes the soft banks away, and in one spot has succeeded in forming a miniature lake wherein to rest and in whose clear waters it is hard to tell where the sky and that which mirrors it begin and end, so transparent are its depths, so white the pebbles, and so motionless lie the foptails yonder. The little circle has forced asunder the alders, and a birch struggling to the light has made a step forward and stands like an innocent legendary child from whose locks the summer air keeps incessantly showering down silver coins.

It was the latter end of June.

In the very center of this basin stood two bare, brown feet, belonging to a maiden who was carefully holding up her black woolen petticoat with two brown hands to match the feet, while she stood bending forward with a look of eager curiosity. Small, a white kerchief covering her shoulders, and a young sunburnt face—the reflection the water threw up was minute and insignificant enough. Utterly indifferent, however, was it to the eyes gazing so earnestly downward as to whether the owner's face be-

longed to the Grecian or Teutonic type. Here, in the loneliest quarter of the moor, no standard of female beauty existed and no comparisons were instituted; but the great charm of the water-mirror lay in the fact that on its pure surface all things, however common, underwent a metamorphosis, a fairy transformation. In the upper world the soft haide wind was playing merrily amid the girl's short locks and blowing them about her neck and forehead; but here below, in those cool depths, they assumed the aspect of raven's wings, the little necklace of red beads looking like dark drops of blood, while the coarse white handkerchief was transformed into a silken texture and looked just like a snow-white water-lily floating on the tiny lake. It was all exactly like one of the loveliest of old-fashioned fairy tales.

The deep blue sky formed a canopy over the breach in the copse, giving a cold steel-like hue to the water below and a background to the girl's reflection. Suddenly glowing shadows began to steal over the smooth lake, and extraordinary as it seemed, they certainly came from the hanging locks of the curly head; they chased each other hither and thither, their color ever deepening in intensity till it seemed as if the whole world were bathed in purple light. The deep shadows nestling amid the brushwood alone seemed to grow black as midnight, and the solitary twigs which projected from them looked like black stalactites reflected in a sea of fire—another turn of the magician's wand in our fairy tale. But this caused a terrible shock. The girl's own shadow assumed as she bent forward the aspect of another, which from the depths beneath looked up with two large awful eyes at her.

The brown feet belonged to no heroine, and with one wild scream she sprang up the bank. What an absurd fright! The evening sky was one sheet of crimson and gold. A bright fleecy cloud floating over the lake was the cause of the ghostly apparition—and the eyes?—was such a coward ever before seen, such a baby to be frightened at one's own eyes?

I was ashamed even of myself, but still more at the presence of my two best friends, who had been silent spectators.

My pretty heifer was not much disconcerted. She was the least intelligent of the two—the bonniest black cow

that had ever ranged the haide plains. There she stood browsing beneath the birch trees and luxuriating in a little patch of juicy grass which the moisture of the river banks had sweetened. She raised her small pretty head, gazed at me for a moment in mute surprise, and then returned to her occupation with un-mistakable relish.

Spitz, on the contrary, who had settled himself for a doze under the bushes, took the matter seriously. He gave a wild bound into the air, and attacking the unoffending water, barked furiously, as though some frightful enemy were at my heels.

It was too ridiculous, and laughing heartily I jumped back into the water and seconded his efforts by shivering the deceitful mirror to a thousand atoms. There was, however, a third witness to this affair, whom neither Spitz nor I had remarked.

"What is my little princess doing here?" he inquired in that kind of muffled, indistinct tone of voice indicative of inseparable companionship with a pipe in the speaker's mouth.

"Oh, it's you, Heinz."

I am not ashamed of him, because he is well known to be afraid of his own shadow, difficult as it is to credit the fact when looking at his stalwart form.

There he stood, Heinz the bee-keeper, shod in such gear that it seemed as if the earth might sink beneath his tread, his tall form towering toward the sky, while its breadth formed a barrier like a granite wall between me and the view across the haide.

Yet at the first white object that meets him in the dusky twilight this giant will take to his heels, and his cowardice supplies me with endless amusement. I tell him long stories of horrors till I grow quite frightened myself and am afraid of every dark corner.

"I am treading down a pair of eyes, Heinz," I exclaimed, giving another stamp, so that the water splashed all over his faded old coat. "Look, am I not right?"

"Not at all—not in daylight."

"Nonsense! What difference does it make to the water-sprite whether it is day or night if she is angry?" I watched the half-nervous, half-incredulous glance he cast at the water with veritable delight. "What! you don't believe it, Heinz? I only wish she had given you such a look, so dreadful."

This fairy conquered him. Taking the pipe from his mouth and pointing it playfully at me, he said, with a smile of mingled triumph and distrust:

"Didn't I always tell you so, eh? But I won't do it again, not a bit of me—heaps of the things may lie there, but I won't touch one of them, not I."

So here I had raised a nice piece of business with my love of jesting.

The little stream, the tiny traveler which wandered through the haide, was richer far than many a proud river which flows past palaces and amid the busy haunts of men. Pearls lay hidden within its recesses, few indeed in quantity and not brilliant enough for a king's diadem, but what did I know of all that? I liked the small round shining things which lay so bright and pretty in the palm of my hand. Many a time had I spent whole hours wading through the water seeking for oysters, and then I had always brought them to Heinz, who understood the art of opening them—a secret he would confide to no one else. Now he was going to renounce the service utterly and conclusively, because he was firmly convinced that the water-sprite would take the law of us as thieves!

"Get away, Heinz," I said in a melancholy tone. "It was only a stupid joke; don't believe such nonsense." And bending over the water, which had nearly settled again, I said: "Look here for yourself. What is looking at you? Nothing, nothing whatever but my own two dreadful eyes. Why are they so unnaturally large, Heinz? Neither Fräulein Streit's eyes nor yet Ilse's would have looked half so terrible."

"No, Ilse's eyes wouldn't either," replied Heinz, "but her eyes are sharp, princess, very sharp."

On his first joining me he had laid his huge hand upon my shoulder quite good-naturedly (for Heinz could not be angry), but after giving utterance to the above sage remark he ran it through his wisp of hair, which stood up like thin yellow stubble about his temples. It absolutely bristled in the warm evening sunshine.

After that he blew forth a cloud of tobacco-smoke, which speedily dispersed a swarm of midges playing round. At home, Ilse "of the sharp eyes" always maintained that tobacco was a disgusting weed. I alone endured it, and should I live to be a hundred, the evil-reputed smell will

always send me back in memory to the warm nook in the chimney corner, where, curled up on the wooden bench by Heinz' side, I enjoyed the delicious sense of his protecting care, while without the snow-storm raged over the plains and hail came pelting like stones hurled against the window-panes.

Just as Mieke came up to pluck the blades of grass which Heinz had trodden under foot I sprang up the bank.

"Ei," said he, laughing, "how grand she looks!"

"Oh, no laughing at that, if you please," I replied in a dignified manner.

Mieke was indeed splendidly adorned. Between her horns hung a garland of birch leaves and marigolds, which became her as though she had been born with it; a chain made of the thick hollow stalks of the dandelion hung round her neck, and to the very end of her tail was attached a bouquet of the haide flowers, which looked so comical when Mieke lashed it about to brush off the gnats.

"She has quite a festive air, hasn't she?" said I; "but you don't know the reason. Now, just think a moment, Heinz, and try to guess. Mieke is dressed up and a cake is baking at the Dierkhof, so now what is it all about?"

But I had just hit on Heinz' weak point; guessing was not his *forte*, and he stood before me as helpless as a child of two years old.

"Ah, you cunning fellow," I continued, laughing, "you only want to escape congratulating me; but that won't succeed. Dear old Heinz, this is my birthday."

An expression of joy and emotion passed over the broad, kind face at this discovery, and stretching out his disengaged hand, in which I laid mine lovingly, he inquired:

"And how old is my little princess?" thus avoiding the expected congratulations.

I laughed and said: "You don't know that either. Well, listen: what comes after sixteen?"

"Sixteen—what—seventeen? It can't be true! Such a little thing! No, it can't be true," he protested, holding up his hands.

This incredulity irritated me; but, after all, my old friend was not far astray. He who had all his life long watched how the pines stretched upward to heaven had seen me for the last three years get no higher than just

to where I could hear his strong heart beat; not one inch had I increased all that time. It was too true, I was and I must remain all my days a mere child in appearance, and that, according to Heinz' opinion, would prevent my ever growing older! For all that I gave him a good scolding, but this time he warded it off, in quite a politic manner changing the subject. Instead of giving me any answer, he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder and said:

"There's an extra birthday celebration going on up there, princess—they are digging up the old king."

At one bound I was on my feet.

The crimson glow of the evening sky was so dazzlingly brilliant that I was forced to shade my eyes with my hand. Yonder, behind the line of the forest, the rays were, as it were, playing through thin mists and vapors, while nearer the ancient giants of the past formed a girdle round the wide-stretching moor, their tall spear-like summits standing out against the sky.

The heath was not yet in blossom, and the ground presented one broad sheet of green-brown vegetation, flat as a table save where in one peculiar spot it swelled suddenly into five gigantic mounds, one enormous one and four smaller. The popular tradition was that these mounds contained the remains of giants who in the days of their flesh had made the earth quake beneath their tread and played at marbles with huge blocks of stone. Juniper trees grew on the top of the highest hill, and on its side the golden broom blossomed. Whether some human hand had planted the solitary old fir tree or a bird carried the seed thither, none could tell. At all events, there it stood sideways, on the edge of the hill, thinly clad, tossed by the wild wind and stunted in its growth by the weight of winter snows; yet standing erect, proud and defiant, the one solitary tree in the midst of the vast plain, battling for its existence against every storm that blew.

Many a time I had said to Heinz as we sat on the hill together in my childhood:

"The old king must be buried here, for there is a tree on this hill and yellow blossoms, and there are none on the others."

I was convinced that where the old tree stood there lay the king's powerful head, with its golden band round the

forehead and the long, long white beard that fell over the purple mantle covering his limbs. This buried secret was hidden in the deepest solitude, but the birds that came from the adjacent wood to rest amid the brushwood and flutter through the broom and heather, the blue butterflies and humming bees—these all shared it. Many a time did I lie, with my hands under my head, scarcely daring to draw breath, watching the ants as they ran in and out of their holes. They doubtless were wiser than we were and knew all about it; they had perhaps run over the purple mantle. How I envied them and longed to discover those hidden marvels.

Up to this moment the great mound had been my garden, my wood, my own undisputed property. My home, the Dierkhof, stood quite alone upon the moor. An infrequented road, which connected it with the outer world, lay through the wood, but far away from the fairy hillocks—never, that I could remember, had a stranger set foot within their kingdom—and now all of a sudden yonder stood a group of unknown people digging up huge clods of earth from these self-same mounds. I watched the ax as it swung high in the air, and so often as it fell with unerring aim did it seem to me as though it hewed the living flesh from some beloved form.

Without pausing to reflect I ran across the field, filled with sympathy and burning with curiosity to know what would come to light. Spitz ran nimbly beside me, and when I reached the spot, breathless with my exertions, I found Heinz had overtaken me with a few gigantic strides.

Not until then did I begin to feel shy and to experience that childish terror which the sight of a strange face always brings over me. I drew back and caught hold of Heinz' coat, which at least afforded me some sense of security and protection.

II.

THREE gentlemen were standing on the top of the hill in a state of breathless expectation, while several workmen were employed digging and shoveling away. At the uproar Spitz made the strangers turned round and looked

at us for a moment. The youngest of the party lifted his stick and shook it at the animal on his attempting to advance nearer. Then, coldly surveying Heinz and me for a moment, he turned his back on us. They were digging near the old pine. The broom which grew round it was torn up and lay scattered here and there, while the gap which they had left exposed to view the great thick roots of my poor fir tree amid a mingled mass of yellow loam and sand: their white flesh was visible; the ax had hewed into them remorselessly.

"They have come upon the stone," said one of the gentlemen as the men's axes sounded against something sharply, and when the last shovelful of earth was finally cleared away an enormous unhewn block of stone was disclosed to view.

The gentlemen moved to one side while the workmen prepared to roll away the stone, but Heinz moved eagerly forward, evidently dissatisfied with the manner of carrying on the work. With one foot in advance he began swaying his great hand to and fro, keeping time with the workers, and his pipe, the while, had no holiday of it. Very soon, indeed, I could only distinguish the strangers through a blue cloud. If only Ilse had been there to witness the effect! The young gentleman, behind whom Heinz was standing, looked round as if he had received a blow. He measured the unfortunate smoker with a long contemptuous stare, then waved his silk pocket handkerchief with an air of disgust, as if to disperse the noisome vapor.

Heinz silently took the *corpus delicti* out of his mouth and threw it aside. He was struck dumb, for his pipe had never before produced such an impression. The stranger's conduct had, however, frightened and intimidated me to the last degree. I was quite ashamed and had already made one step toward retreating, when the stone all at once gave way and rolled a few steps forward with a rumbling sound. That chained me again to the spot.

I was at first unable to see anything, because the gentlemen all pressed round the chasm, but suddenly I ceased to wish to do so and covered my eyes with my hands, fancying some tremendous discovery was now about to take place.

"Potztausend! was that it?" cried Heinz in a voice of undisguised astonishment.

I took one glance, and for a moment the moor with its lights and shadows had disappeared, the shining butterflies seemed to have folded their wings and sunk to rest, even the tall spears against the far-off horizon—whither had they all vanished? The setting sun alone remained, and beneath the hill lay no gray-headed king with flowing beard and gigantic limbs concealed beneath the purple coverlet—nothing but a deep dark abyss yawned at my feet.

To the strangers this seemed to be the natural result. One of them, who wore spectacles and had a large tin box slung across his shoulders, jumped into the hole, followed by the young man; while the third, a tall, thin individual, examined the inner surface of the block of granite just dug up.

"This stone has been cut," he remarked, passing his hand lightly over the surface.

"And so have the others," called a voice from the chasm. "Just look what a magnificent stone roof we have over us—a really superb block!"

Just then the young man reappeared at the opening. He had to stoop so low that his hat fell off. Up to that moment I had seen but few specimens of manhood; with the exception of Heinz, the old clergyman of the nearest parish (some ten miles distant), and a few steady-going coarse-looking farmers, none, save an occasional dirty young broom maker, had ever crossed my path. But a portrait of Charles the Great hung on the wall at the Dierkhof, and I could not help thinking of it as I looked at the uncovered head as it appeared at the mouth of the great dark cavern. The forehead shone like a broad white spotless shield under the masses of auburn hair, which he threw back with an energetic toss of his head.

The young man held a large earthen vessel in his hand; it was of a grayish-yellowish color.

"Take care, Herr Claudius," said the gentleman in spectacles in a warning voice, himself carrying several strange utensils. "These urns are very brittle at first, but quickly harden in the air."

It never reached that safety point, however, for just as it was set on the granite block it broke. A cloud of ashes

rose, and human bones, nearly burned to cinders, were strewn about.

The wearer of the spectacles set up a loud lament. He seized one of the fragments, and pushing up his spectacles began examining the lump of clay where it was freshly broken very eagerly.

"Bah!" exclaimed the young man, "the damage is not great, professor. At least six similar pieces still remain, and they are all as like one another as two peas."

"Yes, yes," he replied sharply, "that sounds very well—just like an amateur."

The other laughed a fascinating laugh; it had a light and mocking sound, yet did one good to hear. He seemed to repent it, for he suddenly became grave.

"I am indeed but an amateur," he apologized, "if an enthusiastic one, and you must therefore substitute mercy for truth when the novice, forgetting the strong curb of science, takes the bit in his mouth and sets off in a wrong direction. To me the chief interest lay in discovering the interior structure of these sepulchers, and—ah, how beautiful," he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself and taking up one of the rare specimens which the professor had ranged in the center of the stone.

The learned man to all appearance never heard the young gentleman's apology. Buried in deep, one might almost say painful thought, he was occupied in the examination of these objects, sometimes holding one up to the light, then again shading it with his hand.

"Hum!" muttered he to himself; "a kind of silver filigree."

"Silver in a prehistoric German tomb, professor?" inquired the young man in a somewhat mocking tone. "Look at this exquisite piece in bronze!" It was a kind of knife or dagger, and he made several passes with it in the air at some imaginary foe, then balanced it playfully on the tips of his fingers. "Certes, no German hand ever used this elegant article," he remarked; "it would have been shattered at the first grasp. And just as little did they ever produce that delicate silver ornament you have in your hand, professor. In the end, it will turn out that Dr. von Sassen is right when he maintains that these so-called Hun graves are the tombs of Phenician pioneers."

Dr. von Sassen! How the name went through me! I

even thought the speaker pointed at me as he uttered it, and I expected all eyes would be turned on my poor, frightened little person directly. How I longed for the earth to open and swallow me up! But it was all nonsense. Nobody gave me a thought and I began to breathe once more, when oh, misery, I had never once thought of him—of Heinz, and there he stood, the slyboots, looking knowingly at me and whispering from behind his hand, “Ah, princess, the people are talking about——”

“Be quiet, Heinz,” I desired, and actually stamped my foot at him for the first time in my life.

For a moment he looked petrified, then shyly turned his face the other way. Meantime the attention of the others had been attracted, and for the first time they seemed to notice that the object behind them was neither a stick nor a stone, but a timid little maiden. They favored me with a fixed stare of curiosity, and I felt but too anxious to escape from the whole affair, and yet some irresistible attraction held me spell-bound to the spot. At the time I fancied this proceeded solely from the desire to hear more of the owner of that name. The fact that Heinz’ remark had failed to reach the strangers’ ears also helped to reassure me.

The words “Phenician pioneers” had set the professor’s soul on fire. An acknowledged opponent of this theory, he defended his own point of view in a speech of passionate ardor, to which the young gentleman listened with dutiful attention. The individual in the brown hat seemed, on the other hand, to have little sympathy with the learned disputations. He kept pacing up and down quietly, gazed long and thoughtfully into the open tomb, and ended by climbing the hill to obtain a full view of the vast plain.

Meantime the glowing sunset paled and gradually disappeared in violet tints below the horizon. Nothing save a faint streak of red bordering the long line of clouds remained visible, and it seemed as it were to point like an outstretched arm toward the desecrated resting-place. The deceptive glare of the play was o’er, and once again the sky wore its dark-blue solemn aspect. The crescent moon, whose tender light had been eclipsed till now by the universal glow, began to shine and deepen gradually into gold.

The gentleman on the hill drew out his watch. “It is

time to break up," he called aloud. "It will be a full hour before we can reach the carriage."

"Yes, uncle," replied the young man, "unfortunately a very long hour. I wish we had already left this dreary waste behind us," and he glanced at his elegantly shod feet. This was addressed to the professor, who after an emphatic "Well, we shall see" had brought his speech abruptly to a conclusion. "Must we really return by the same wretched road?" continued the young man.

"I know of no other," replied the philosopher with a shrug.

The young gentleman surveyed the landscape gloomily and repeated with ironical pathos,

" 'How tranquil lies the moor
Beneath the noonday's burning rays.'

I don't understand how people can poetize about a moor; it would freeze the poetic thought within my brain, the glowing words upon my tongue. Are you really serious about your predilection for this desert, professor? If so, I entreat you show me something besides moor—moor—everlasting moor, that intolerable brown plain. Is there even the note of a bird to be heard? And where has the busy hum of human life, which one expects to hear around, disappeared to? Is it buried underground? I can't help it, professor. Your favorite haide appears to me like a God-forgotten child in a dingy brown garb."

The professor made no reply. He only led the young man toward the back of the hill, and taking him by the shoulder bade him look southward.

There lay the Dierkhof. From every tile of its broad strong roof grew the wild flowers of the moor, while the house itself stood embosomed in the midst of four splendid oaks. Great clouds of smoke, reminding one of steaming pots and a cozy hearth, rose and vanished in the light summer breeze far above the black-and-white Frau Störchin, who sat with her long legs concealed in the nest, her red bill resting on her breast. It was still light enough to discern the rich pasture of the green fields and to catch a faint glimpse of the garden—all looked like a reflection which the roseate glow of evening had left behind. There were Ilse's pets, the great orange marigolds, and at that identical moment up came Mieke, satiated and

weary, seeking home of her own accord. She stood for a moment irresolutely before the open door, which stood invitingly ajar, and the noble animal completed the picture of rural prosperity.

"Does that look as if weak-minded nincompoops dwelt there?" asked the professor, smiling. "Just come and visit the moor a month hence, when it is one sheet of bloom and the purple gleams and glistens! It is just like fairyland. And later still when it presents one mass of burnished gold, the gold of honey, what more can you desire? The 'God-forgotten child' then dons the robe of a king's daughter, and many of its little streams, such as you see yonder, contain pearls."

"Yes, millions of watery pearls flowing toward the ocean," laughed the young man.

The professor shook his head impatiently, and despite his withered face, his jaw-breaking words, and ugly rattling box, my heart was drawn to him for his defense of my beloved moor; in a few concise words he had summed up the blessings and beauties which it breathed.

I determined, however, to take down this young gentleman's insolence, whose scorn and ridicule made my blood boil. To this day I know not whence I summoned courage, but suddenly I found myself at his side, presenting my hand, in which lay five pearls.

I felt as if I were standing on hot burning coals; my lips were trembling with nervousness and shame and my eyes were fixed on the ground. All around me grew dark; every one crowded about me; the gentleman who had meantime left the hill, the workmen, Heinz with his gigantic boots—all were there.

"Ha! ha! Mr. Claudius, see there: the child wants to give you a lesson! Bravo, little maiden, bravo!" cried the professor, at once surprised and delighted.

The young man never uttered a syllable. Perhaps he was struck dumb by the audacity of a haide child daring to approach him in a coarse linen jacket and woollen petticoat. Slowly, and as it seemed to me reluctantly, he stretched out his hand to take them—and then, indeed, shame and fright thoroughly overcame me. My own sunburnt hands beside those milk-white fingers and polished nails looked as brown as coffee. I shrank back involuntarily and would have flung away the pearls for a song.

"I declare they have not been bored yet!" he exclaimed, rolling two of the tiny beads about in the palm of his hand.

"Oh, I admit there is much to desire in the way of form and color," said the professor apologetically. "They are grayish and irregular and of but little real value; still, it is interesting to meet with them."

"I should like to keep them," said the young man in a tone that sounded like a polite request.

"Take them, then," I replied curtly, without looking up. I fancied every word I uttered betrayed my beating heart.

He took the remaining pearls carefully from my hand, and I then observed the gentleman in the brown hat take some glittering thing out of his pocket; it made a chinking sound.

"Here, my child," said he, laying five large round shining pieces in my hand.

I looked up at him and saw a broad-brimmed hat which nearly hid his face, and in addition a pair of blue spectacles which threw a ghastly light on the cheek.

"What is that?" I inquired, fascinated in spite of myself by the size and glitter of the strange things.

"What is that!" repeated the gentleman in amazement. "Don't you know what money is, little one? Have you never had any thalers before?"

"No, sir," replied Heinz, stepping forward and answering for me in a tone of fatherly authority. "The old lady never allows money in the house, and if she finds any throws it at once into the river."

"What! And who is this extraordinary old woman?" inquired the three gentlemen in a breath.

"The princess' grandmother."

At this the young gentleman burst out laughing. "This princess?" he inquired, pointing at me.

I dropped the silver coins upon the ground and fled. Wicked, wicked Heinz! Why had I ever told him that story about the lovely princess at the Erbsen-Prüfstein, and why had I allowed him ever since to call me "his little princess" because he fancied that earth contained nothing tinier or tenderer than the small, light-footed morsel of humanity which tripped over the wild moor by his side?

I ran home as if pursued. The young man's derisive laugh seemed to follow me, and I had some dim notion that once under the Dierkhof roof it would cease to torment me.

Ilse was standing at the door, evidently on the lookout for me, for Mieke had returned alone. Even in the distance my gaze was riveted on that form which stood out in hard sharp outline in the evening twilight against the long dark passage behind her. How dear that fair head yonder was to me! It was just as yellow as Heinz' thin stubble, and strove along the parting to stand upright like a brush. Ilse had the same pointed nose as her brother and the same fresh, pure blood which gave her cheeks such a ruddy glow—but the eyes, those eyes which brother Heinz had such respect for, were altogether different, and as I drew near I did not like them.

"Have you lost your senses, Lenore?" she began in her usual abrupt manner. She was angry, as angry as her ordinarily calm and equable temperament admitted, for she called me by my name, and that never occurred except when her temper was ruffled. She then silently pointed at the spot I was standing on, and I then first perceived (what really was dreadful) that my feet were bare.

"Ah, Ilse," I replied, quite subdued, "my shoes and stockings are by the river's brim."

"Silly, fetch them immediately."

She turned away and moved toward the hearth which, though arranged in the more economical style of modern days, still retained the old-fashioned position habitual in thoroughly North Saxon houses, viz., at the furthest end of the barn or sometimes even the cattle-stalls. Ilse had bacon on the fire, which was crackling and smelled so good, and from the steaming pot of potatoes great bubbles were rising.

Supper was evidently just ready, and if I wished to be in good time I must make haste, yet for the whole world I could not venture again outside that door. If, however, I stole out by one of the back doors the Dierkhof itself would conceal me, and I could reach the river unseen by the people on the hill.

III.

I TOOK a few steps toward a side door, which, situated between the barn and the dwelling-rooms, led into the open air, into the so-called orchard. But Ilse barred my way and held up a warning finger at me.

"You cannot go out there," said she in a low voice; "your grandmother is there."

The door stood open and I could see her working away at the pump-handle furiously; a not uncommon sight, for she did the same every day.

My grandmother was tall and powerfully made. Her face, from the roots of her hair down to her neck, was one mass of bright red. This coloring, combined with her strongly marked features, her bulky form, long strides, and sudden energetic gestures, gave her a wild and ferocious aspect. Even now, when I recall the moments in which I have come upon her unawares, the trembling and cracking of the boards under her feet, and the sudden rush of wind her passing made, despite her black eyes and thoroughly Oriental cast of feature I am reminded of those Amazonian Cimbrian women who, with a skin bound round them, battle-ax in hand, cast themselves into the midst of men in battle.

My grandmother was holding her head under the heavy stream of water. It was flowing over her face and her coarse gray hair, which was hanging down in the well. Such was her habitual custom even in the severest winter. This refreshment seemed as indispensable to her existence as the very air she breathed. Still, her face struck me to-day as being redder than ever. Even under the stream of icy water it shone with a deep red hue, and as she raised herself up and threw back her head with a long sigh of satisfaction, I noticed that her lips were quite blue.

I looked at Ilse. She was standing gazing before her, apparently lost in thought; her cold blue eyes were softened by an expression of melancholy.

"What ails grandmother?" I inquired anxiously.

"Nothing," she replied curtly. "It is sultry to-day." Evidently she was annoyed at her sadder mood being noticed.

"Is there no remedy, Ilse, against this fearful rush of blood to the head?"

"She won't take anything, you know that. Yesterday evening she threw out the foot-bath at my very feet. Now go, child, and fetch your things."

Thereupon she returned to the hearth and I obediently left the house by another door. I sprang toward the river, which was about thirty paces from the Dierkhof, and tried to make my way through the brushwood growing on its banks. This was not so easy, for it had been allowed to grow at will undisturbed by the hand of man. Notwithstanding I persevered, for though the tough willows impeded my progress and hurt my bare feet, yet they acted as a complete protection from the strangers' eyes, and by the time I had made some way I had ample reason to bless the shelter they afforded me. Right across the moor, what did I behold but the three gentlemen making for the river, with Heinz in advance.

I still hoped to reach the little nook where I had left my shoes and stockings before they came up to it, but all my efforts were in vain, so I crouched resignedly in the copse, tolerably near the desired goal.

I could easily guess what had led them thither, for Heinz was pointing out the smooth grassy path which led through the copse by the river's brim. Walking was indeed somewhat different there from on the rough wild heather. The path was smooth and soft as velvet and seemed formed for dainty feet. The gentlemen passed quite close to me. I could hear the sound of their footsteps and feel the stirring of the branches which softly played against my arm. At the birch tree they made a pause.

"Aha! the haide princess has been making her toilet here," exclaimed the young gentleman.

My heart was in my mouth. I bent eagerly forward and saw him pick up one of the shoes. Instinct at that moment seemed to tell me how a lady's delicate slipper ought to look. I had read in fairy-tales of little red shoes, of slippers embroidered in silver, etc., and the paper on which this enchanted lore was inscribed seemed far too coarse to serve even for the soles of these ethereal works of art in silk and velvet. The ill-shaped specimen which the stranger now held up to view with a laugh was made of the strongest calf-skin—in Ilse's eyes wood itself was not sufficiently stout or durable for my fidgety feet.

This very morning the shoes had been left beside my bed, brand-new, accompanied by a pair of strong stockings which Ilse had spun and knitted herself out of the wool of the haide sheep. It was her birthday gift to me, of which she was genuinely proud. I had been delighted with them, and Ilse had given a nod of satisfaction at the extra row of shining nails the shoemaker had ornamented the soles with; now these same rows were shining out inimically at me.

"My—what a child! She has actually left her shoes behind her," said Heinz, shaking his head. "Quite new shoes, too. I wonder what Ilse would say to that," he added anxiously.

"Whose is the child we saw on the hill?" inquired the old gentleman with the brown hat and the soft voice.

"She lives at the Dierkhof, sir."

"Yes, but what is her name?"

Heinz cocked his hat on one side and scratched his ear. I saw his answer would be cunning—that he was thinking of the dreadful moment when I had stamped at him—and oh, he knew how to get out of the difficulty.

"Well, sir, Ilse calls her 'child' and I call her——"

"Princess," suggested the young gentleman in the same tone of gravity as my sly friend. Just as he had thrown away the discoveries from the grave above, so in like manner did he fling that little horror of a shoe away now, only on this occasion he pretended that it cost him quite an effort.

"Ah, the ladies in the haide like to leave an impression behind them," he remarked to the gentleman in the brown hat. "Charlotte ought really to see this beautiful piece of fairy lightness, uncle. I have a great mind to bring it with me."

"No nonsense, Dagobert," interrupted the other sternly; but Heinz only said:

"Oh, not at all, sir! But what would Ilse say—quite new shoes, too!"

"Brr—this Ilse seems to be the dragon that guards this barefooted princess—*voilà!*" And he flung the shoes away again with a laugh, rubbing his hands together to brush off the dust.

They then saluted Heinz and proceeded on their way, leaving my old friend in the act of packing my unfortu-

nate shoes into his capacious pocket, whither the stockings followed on his discovering them waving on a bush close by. This ended, he set off for the Dierkhof at a rapid pace.

I stayed a little longer in my hiding-place listening to the strangers' footsteps as they gradually died away on the soft sod. I was greatly excited, but in those days I could not analyze the feelings which seemed literally choking me. Tears, hitherto suppressed, came to my relief, and I indulged in a passionate flood of them. Pique, a vindictive pique, was my ailment. "How silly," I muttered between my teeth, thinking of Heinz' diplomatic answer. He could easily have said that Dr. von Sassen is my father; but no, he must needs answer like a Solomon; and I felt angry, oh, how angry with him.

I left the thicket. Clouds of smoke were no longer ascending from the Dierkhof. Ilse, no doubt, had dished the potatoes long ago and laid aside a few of the finest on a plate with a bowl of rich milk, for she spoiled even when she pretended to be angry with me. No doubt she was watching for me at the present moment, but home I could not go without first looking how the strangers had left my poor mangled hill.

It looked better than I expected. The block was replaced in its former position, the earth thrown up on it again, and the fragments of the vessels were no longer visible. Nothing was out of order save the bushes which had been torn up. They lay strewn around, and on the small patch of sand at the foot of the hill lay a heap of human ashes, while half-concealed beneath a plant of broom lay a small, half-burned bone, forever separated now from the other members, which had no doubt been replaced in the tomb.

I lifted it up carefully. The young gentleman had been right—the mound had contained no giants. The fragile structure which I held in my hand was probably once a finger-bone clothed in soft flesh, delicately formed, and boasting perhaps as smooth and white a skin as that which I had this day seen and admired. Perhaps it had been loved and decked with costly jewels; or mayhap on its slightest movement hung the weal or woe of many a human soul. I climbed up the hill and buried it at the foot of the old pine. The good old tree spread its branches

protectingly over it, but who could say if it had not itself that day received its death-blow?

Embracing its trunk with my arm, I gazed where the little river yonder wound its way toward the wood. How rare was it to see mankind there! Men's footsteps on that still, solemn, monotonous waste, where the only sound ever heard was the cry of some bird of prey wheeling his giddy flight so high amid the heavens that his shrill note was lost in space! Now it seemed to me as if the echo of those retreating footsteps could never again die away.

They were hastening back into the world—the world!—I too had been there already. To me, indeed, it had consisted only of a dark back room and a damp little garden surrounded on all sides by enormously high houses; and out of that busy multitude also called “the world,” but a few individual faces had come within my immediate observation. In that self-same back room the three first years of my life had been spent. Around the one face most firmly fixed in my memory hung a cloud of thin gray curls, and I could still have painted the glitter of the pale green eyes, the thick cocked nose and gray lifeless complexion. Such was Fräulein Streit, the lady from whom I received my first lessons.

One other face floated now and then across the dim background of these my earliest remembrances. I had seen it but too rarely, but in later days, when I heard the rustling of silk, a shadow with imperfect outlines seemed to pass before me and a voice to say in tones of annoyance, “Child, you make me nervous.” Angry and nervous thereby became synonymous terms to me. This form in rustling silk, which never did more than pass through the back room, and once perhaps at most laid a warm soft hand upon my head—this lady was called by Fräulein Streit “gnädige Frau” and by me “Mamma.”

There came a day when I awoke, no longer in the dismal back chamber, but in the arms of a great, tall man, with stiff yellow hair, who was carrying me. He looked at me kindly and said, “Ha! ha! have you slept it out?” Beside him walked Fräulein Streit dressed in black. Heavy tears were coursing down her cheeks, and I noticed that she wrung her hands in silence. Right before us stood the house with the stork's nest and four oaks, and

just as I looked into the man's heated face and prepared myself to give a fine loud scream of terror, he called out "Come, Putschen," and a whole flock of different-colored fowl ran out of the house door to meet him.

Yonder also stood the lady with the red face. She offered Fräulein Streit her hand and kissed me, weeping, which greatly terrified me. This, however, was soon forgotten. A calf was playing about in the farm-yard, and it suddenly stood up on its hind legs before the man and remained in that ridiculous position. The stork was clapping on the roof, and Ilse—Ilse of the black eyes—held a little animal before me whose soft velvet fur I patted fearlessly; it was a little mewing kitten. The bright golden sunshine played over the whole scene; the leaves on the trees were rustling in the haide breeze. I screamed and cried with joy, while poor Fräulein Streit was sobbing her heart out on the threshold.

It was thus I made my entry at the Dierkhof in Heinz' arms, and from that moment life began for me. (The previous night, while every one was weeping over me, I had suddenly become a happy child.) Huzzah! Every day I trotted after Heinz over the broad moor merrily. On the loneliest spot of it stood a mud cabin with a low thatched roof; great, tall Heinz had to double himself in two to enter; but within it was comfortable. Table and chairs were white as snow, and behind the doors of the two cupboards, which were formed out of recesses in the wall, lay huge feather-beds in clean covers of variegated hue. Heinz and Ilse had been broom makers as children, and their old father had built this cabin with his own hands; the two children had been born in it and Heinz had resolved that nowhere else would he die. In July he took charge of the bee-hives belonging to the farms around the moor, and was otherwise occupied several days in the week working at the Dierkhof.

I was soon just as much at home in the mud cabin as in my grandmother's house. I helped Heinz to eat his buckwheat cake and was always present when he cut and brought home hay for the Dierkhof. He used to lift me up to where the old worn-out bee-hives were hung in the lofts, where the poultry made their nests, and amid shouts of joyous laughter I handed Ilse, who stood near, the beautiful white eggs.

During all this time Fräulein Streit sat in the large sitting-room, working and crying the live-long day. The dear old room must have looked funny enough in those days, with nothing but the bare white-washed walls, the antiquated brown wooden bench behind the stove, and the tables standing hither and thither in the most uncivilized manner. My grandmother had indeed, in honor of Fräulein Streit, sent to the town for a finely upholstered sofa, and Ilse had hung up striped blue-and-white curtains. Fräulein Streit generally kept these curtains drawn, complaining that the boundless stretch of moor with its deadly stillness frightened her; and when the sun was bright or the moon shone it was all the same—it still frightened her. In my fifth year she began to teach me; then Ilse used to bring in her work and listen; at fifteen she had entered my grandmother's service, then in town. She had had her taught to read and write a little, but notwithstanding the dear old thing began again with me. Many a time, when worn out and weary with racing and running, I have laid my head of an evening on Ilse's breast; then Heinz has joined us (of course with his cold pipe) and Fräulein Streit used actually to become animated; her wan cheeks would flush and the gray curls flutter around her face. Then she would relate whole histories of life as it was carried on in my parental home, and it seemed to grow quite clear to me. I learned that my father was a man of celebrity, my late mother a scholar and a poetess. Many renowned and distinguished people frequented our house, and when Fräulein Streit came to the description of her own white dress and the rose-colored ribbons she wore in her hair because it was the "gnädige Frau's" reading evening, all kinds of dreary recollections seemed to float through my childish brain. Once again I heard the bustle passing to and fro by my door, my evening milk was brought me icy cold, and when I awoke from my first sleep I was all alone in the ghostly room. Once again I seemed to realize that terror and scream aloud, and Miss Streit came gliding in like a ghost, scolded me, stopped my mouth with a bon-bon, covered me up to my nose, and glided out again.

With these exceptions, the "heavenly remembrances" of my teacher affected me but little, and I generally slept through them till mercilessly aroused by the dragging at my hair.

My long black locks were always forced to undergo the same process every night as the thin gray ones; every night I was compelled to pray for that father whose face no effort on my part enabled me to recall.

So passed year after year, Fräulein Streit growing more and more dissatisfied with each and weeping more abundantly. Oftentimes she used to stand in the orchard and sing in a faint pathetic voice:

“Eilende Wolken! Segler der Lüte!
Wer mit euch wanderte, mit euch schiffte.”

But one day something fell from her mouth and clattered on her plate at dinner. To my amazement it turned out to be a false tooth; but after that she made up her mind to leave at once, and so, wringing her hands, she packed up.

“I owe it to myself, good Ilse,” she said in taking leave of her. “One has no prospects here.” And tears streamed down the poor old face.

No prospect in the wide, wide moor! I was quite petrified by this accusation brought against my idolized home. Heinz drove Fräulein Streit and her trunk to the nearest village, and I accompanied them part of the way. After we had said good-by I stood and gazed after Fräulein Streit’s retreating form till the last vestige of her floating dress was lost in the distant wood. Then off I snatched my hat, threw it up in the air, tore off my tiresome jacket, without which Fräulein Streit had never allowed me to go out—oh, how delightfully the fresh air played about my bare neck and arms!—and in this guise I returned home. Ilse had already removed the sofa from the despised chamber and covered it with a cloth; the blue-and-white curtains she had carefully folded up, ready to be laid by in the chest.

I marched straight up to Ilse, holding my long cumbersome locks, and said, “Cut them off, Ilse,” and off they came with great clips of the scissors, such as it was a pleasure to hear. The hair was thrown on the back of the fire, my jacket was consigned to the press, and henceforth I roamed about clad in petticoat and bodice, just like Ilse.

As I stood under the old fir tree gazing after the retreating figures, all these details passed through my mind. It was growing dark too, and the strangers were by this time

scarcely to be distinguished from the surrounding bushes, and they had already gone so far that I could no longer even hear their footsteps, but I knew for all that that they were straining every nerve to leave the despised moor behind them, just as Fräulein Streit in days gone by. What would the young gentleman have said had he but known that the red-faced old lady at the Dierkhof had once fled from a populous city to make her home on the moor? Fräulein Streit, indeed, had always fancied that my grandmother was very profound and had shrunk from her nervous glance, but to me the peculiarity about her seemed inseparable from her whole appearance, and if it increased imperceptibly (as it did) while I grew up, I thought it was only just what happened with all grandmothers. How did it come, then, that I began to speculate so suddenly on subjects which had hitherto appeared to me as matters of course? The unbounded astonishment of the strangers at "the old woman who allowed no money in the house" had awakened my curiosity, and I asked myself, Was it not equally strange that as years rolled on my grandmother had ceased speaking—that she avoided meeting any of the other occupants of the house and only cast a terribly stern glance at me if I happened to cross her path? She also refused ever to eat a morsel from any other hand than her own. Eggs, on which she chiefly lived, she always got from the nest herself; the cow was always milked by her, that no other hand might touch the milk vessel, no other breath pass over the liquid she used; bread and meat she never touched; now and then, soon after my arrival, she had bestowed on me an occasional caress, but later she appeared to have forgotten my existence.

My father sent me no new governess, to my grandmother I was the same as nothing, and the distant village schoolmaster was no sorcerer. Ilse thought all this too bad for me, so she did not attempt to send me to school, but undertook the task of teaching me herself every evening—and the task was bitter enough. She generally read me some chapters of the Bible, but always in an undertone, and it did not escape me how often she paused and listened, looking anxiously toward my grandmother's room. I was also confirmed by the old pastor of the parish, for I had learned an immense deal by heart with Ilse. At that time she literally stole out of the Dierkhof with me,

Heinz keeping watch the while, and I knelt in the little village church and there made my declaration of faith without my grandmother having the faintest suspicion of such a thing.

It was thus I grew up, wild and free as the willows beside the stream, and as I stood there under the old pine, barefooted and clad in a coarse short petticoat, the evening breeze playing in my wavy hair, I laughed, laughed aloud at the young dandy who had sought out the soft turf for his dainty boots and incased his white hands in leather—that was my revenge.

IV.

IN the houses in North Saxony the passage which connects the barn and the dwelling-rooms, where the kitchen-range is situated, is called the fleet. At the Dierkhof it was raised, according to ancient custom, several inches above the earthen floor of the barn; but with this exception there was nothing, not even a wooden partition, to separate the latter from the dwelling-rooms. This arrangement enabled people to take at one glance a view of the whole establishment, extending from the threshing-floor to the principal entrance and embracing even the cattle-stalls on either side. From this passage a window and two doors opened into the dwelling-rooms; it was nicely paved, and as already mentioned a door on either side led into the open air; to me it was the coziest spot in all the house; yonder too, not far from the hearth, stood the summer dining-table.

When, after my return home from my wild evening ramble, I entered this quiet nook with Ilse, the lamp was already burning on the table, but it looked like a mere spark in the midst of that huge, dark, smoky apartment. The last streaks of the fading twilight stole through the open door and lighted up the inviting cattle-stalls. They were empty. At the Dierkhof farming was carried on only just as far as our own immediate wants demanded. Near the door, however, with her head turned toward the barn, lay Mieke, chewing the cud. She held her horns toward me, evidently feeling her heavy garland unsuitable for a night toilet.

Ilse cast one glance at the "festively adorned" beast, and turning away her head tapped me lightly on the shoulder. I did not require to be told she was laughing at my "eternal nonsense."

Supper had been served in my absence. A huge pile of potato-skins bore witness to Heinz' feats at it. Ilse this time without a lecture, removed my cold potatoes and substituted in their stead some nice, well-cooked eggs. I heard Heinz pottering about in the orchard outside, and Ilse was also busy running hither and thither; her hands were full, and it certainly was not the time to choose, but the question which had been hovering on my lips would come out.

"Ilse, what is the name of the place my father lives in now?"

She was just in the act of crossing over toward the orchard, but stood still in amazement.

"Do you want to write to him?" she inquired.

I laughed out loud. "I? I write a letter? Oh, Ilse, how ridiculous that sounds! No, no, I only want to know the name of the people my father is living with now."

"Must you know it immediately?"

I did not venture to say "yes," but Ilse no doubt saw burning impatience written in my face, for she disappeared into the other room and brought out a little box.

"There," she said, "look for the address yourself—I don't remember it; but don't lose anything and don't rummage too much."

She left me. How neatly and systematically the written link between the Dierkhof and the outer world was arranged in that small square box! There lay the thin, fragile envelope which inclosed my father's letters. They bore only Ilse's address, contained only a few polite lines, a remembrance to my grandmother and myself, and a decided negative to Ilse's oft-repeated request that I might be removed from the Dierkhof and sent to school. Whatever correspondence had been kept up with the outer world had been carried on entirely through Ilse; she discharged her part in it with sighs and infinite trouble—in great stiff characters and with characteristic brevity. I never troubled my head about it, for in proportion to my love of reading, and insatiable as my desire to con over the well-worn children's story-books left by Fräulein

Streit, so great was my detestation of writing. I literally hated it. Among my father's letters I found one which I knew had but recently arrived. "To Frau Rätin von Sassen, Hanover," was written in light, elegant characters on the envelope; another and coarser hand had added the name of the post-town nearest the Dierkhof. This letter was to my grandmother, and the only one I could remember ever having been thus addressed since I had come to the house. When Heinz had brought it in and given it to Ilse a few weeks previously, I had just glanced at the writing and run away without waiting to hear its contents. Nothing beyond the haide and what immediately concerned it possessed the faintest attraction for me. But a change had suddenly come over me in this respect. The broken seal tempted me to take a glance at the sheet within, but I dared not do so without Ilse's permission, so I laid the letter aside upon the table.

My father's address was soon found. As I sought it out impatiently from among his last letters, what should I see written under his name but "Firma Claudius, No. 64 in K."

A sudden pang shot through me, and I felt the color rise flaming to my cheeks as I saw the name which the professor had mentioned the previous day standing in black and white before me. How quickly did my father's hasty cramped writing become legible to me! I knew the contents of these letters thoroughly. Ilse had read them to me before, yet I began to go over them once more. There was the uniform emptiness and coldness for which my father's letters were remarkable. He never once inquired "what is my child doing? Is she well and does she think of me?" and at that moment it suddenly dawned upon me, if but dimly, that herein he was guilty of a great wrong toward me.

The meaningless lines closed with the words, "The letter from Naples is to remain unanswered and to be kept, as a matter of course, from my mother." This evidently referred to the letter which lay near me; it bore the Naples post-mark and was, of course, doubly interesting to me now.

I folded up the transparent sheet, disheartened and disappointed. It told nothing of my father's abode or of his connection with the people of the name of Claudius.

Suddenly I sprang up and threw it back into the box. What were these strangers to me? There was I, sitting grumbling over people that were nothing, absolutely nothing to me, while Heinz was fussing and bustling about the yard outside. At other times whenever he began working after hours I always tapped him on the shoulder, took him by the arm, and dragged him *nolens volens* into the hall, where I made him sit down on the wooden bench, his own undisputed place. After that I reached him a lighted match of pine wood, and in a few minutes a cloud of smoke would envelop his dear smiling face. Ilse also generally brought her sewing, while I read aloud with undiminished ardor the tales I already knew by heart. If it was wet or chilly outside, then the fire was piled up doubly within and Ilse would pour us out some hot tea.

How cozy it was to sit thus in that sheltered hall, under the warm roof, on which the rain came plashing incessantly, while the bright glow from the hearth shone around, and a home-like calm pervaded the large space filled with clouds of tobacco-smoke. Now and then the chain round Mieke's neck rattled, or the sleepy hens roosting above gave a stir, or Spitz, perhaps, would give himself another stretch upon the hearth-stone. All, everything I loved was contained within those four walls. My soul was tranquil, had no longings, no desires; my young heart was only full of tenderness for those two between whom I sat, and now strange faces suddenly came in between, and I blushed to think what an effect their influence had produced on me all at once.

There was no deceiving myself. Instead of clinging to my old friend, whom the distinguished young gentleman had regarded with such disdain, I had absolutely felt ashamed of him. I had lost my temper, stamped my foot at him who had always shown such unwearied patience with me, and scolded him simply because he had puzzled his brains to answer as he thought I wished and desired. And why had I done all this? Because I was all at once possessed with the fancy to show off my celebrated father, to whom I was a nonentity, while Heinz' kind arms had protected me throughout my infancy and childhood.

I must beg his pardon, penitently beg his pardon, and that immediately. This decision was easily arrived at, for at that moment the door out of the orchard opened and

Heinz entered, followed by Spitz. I flew toward him and laid my hand on his broad breast—higher I could not reach.

“Heinz, you are dreadfully angry with me, are you not?”

“Ei, princess, I must first know what about,” said he, his pipe in his mouth and he himself standing still and motionless before me.

“You do know why, Heinz,” I replied. “Scold me well. I have been abominably naughty. You could not have believed it of me, now, could you—to stamp at you actually!”

“Oh, that was only a jest.”

“A jest? Nothing of the kind. It was earnest, real bitter earnest! Do not be so good to me, Heinz. I don’t deserve it and I must be punished. I have been childish, and passionate, and a miserably ungrateful thing.”

“Eh, indeed, and what else besides?”

“A coward, Heinz! Yes, that was what set me beside myself. There I stood, hemmed in, as it were, on the hill, and all eyes would no doubt have been turned on me had you said——”

“Wouldn’t have said anything! Ha! ha! ha! not one word,” and he tapped his forehead with his forefinger. “Cunning as they are, they might have questioned long enough in vain.” And with a sudden movement he dived into the recesses of his pocket, saying: “But this lump of money, which was rolling about upon the ground—that the people would not take back again, say what I would; so I had to pick it up, and there it is, princess.”

And as he spoke he placed the bright crown pieces in a pile on the palm of his hand, while his small eyes ran over them lovingly.

Five silver pieces—one for each pearl! That was what had been intended. The old gentleman’s “Here, my child” had sounded so exactly as if I had expected this for them, and I had meant them all the time as a present. This idea vexed me now beyond endurance, and I growled out, “I won’t have them, Heinz,” trying at the same time to knock up his hand. I succeeded but too well, and once again the money rolled upon the ground, but oh, what a fearful noise the great metal pieces made as they clinked against the stone pavement. Such a sound

had not been heard within the Dierkhof walls for years, and I had never heard it.

I turned involuntarily, with a nervous glance, toward a window which overlooked the fleet, and which was always heavily draped with a thick curtain, never raised within my memory. Now it was suddenly withdrawn and my grandmother peered out.

That was a look which might have chilled the stoutest heart. Trembling, I stooped to gather up the money, but at that moment the door next the window flew open, a hurricane seemed to pass through the room, and I was seized by the shoulder and thrown down on the floor.

"Don't touch it," echoed in my ear; and how frightful did that long-silent voice sound to me now. I looked up terrified.

There stood that powerful being shaking her hand fiercely at Heinz. "Du" * came hissing from her lips.

"Be calm, gnädige Frau,† be calm," he stammered entreatingly. "I'll carry the whole affair and throw it into the river on the spot."

He was trembling like an aspen leaf, and his fresh rosy face was pale to his very lips.

With a gesture of passion she turned her back on him; her long gray locks were streaming about her, and with a beating heart I awaited her next movement. At that instant she struck her foot against one of the coins and recoiled as though a serpent had stung her. Then ensued a scene such as I can never forget. Tittering, she sent the money at her feet spinning along the floor, first one piece, then another, and thus she went all over the hall, till I could not help thinking of a cat playing with a mouse. With what fearful rapidity, too, did the change of expression pass over her features. She evidently spurned the money from her with horror and disgust, and yet as often as it rang upon the ground she would stretch out her long neck, listening with evident delight and even a degree of curiosity to the clear silver tone till the last echo had died away.

I never moved from the spot and scarcely dared to breathe. Spitz, the frisky Spitz, slunk away with his

* Thou—the German method of addressing intimates and inferiors.

† "Honored madam."

tail between his legs and nestled at Heinz' side, who himself stood as if rooted to the spot, while his anxious eyes were frequently directed toward me. Ach, Ilse—where was she—the only one who had any influence over my grandmother? Was it possible she didn't hear the noise that was echoing so strangely through the Dierkhof's ancient halls?

Thus the ringing and jumping of the money went on. The old lady appeared to have forgotten that two people were witnesses to her exploits. She ran hither and thither ever more and more excitedly, whispering and gesticulating to something invisible. Suddenly she gave a violent start and advanced toward the table as if petrified. There she paused for a long time, taking a sidelong glance at it; there lay the unfortunate letter which, according to my father's express desire, she was never to see.

"To Frau Räthin von Sassen," she said, at last breaking the death-like stillness and passing her hand over her forehead with a deep sigh. "Frau Räthin von Sassen. I was that—I——"

I debated with myself as to whether I should spring forward and take the letter from her, upon which she was just about to lay her hand. But what was I, a poor weak creature, in comparison with that great powerful woman? Doubtless she would have spurned me away and made herself mistress of the paper. I made every possible sign to Heinz, but he looked quite blankly at me and the dreaded moment came. My grandmother drew the letter out of its cover.

"Let us see," she said while she unfolded it slowly. She read nothing—her eye but fell upon the signature. What kind of a name could it have been to produce such an effect? With one wild shriek the old lady crumpled the letter up in her fingers. "Thy Christine," she cried, and throwing the shapeless bundle of paper on the floor she fled back to her room with a gesture of avoidance, and immediately after the bolt within was drawn.

Ilse, who was just coming in with a basket of turf, stopped on the threshold in amazement.

"Wasn't that grandmother?" she inquired in a terrified tone. The door which had just closed was one never used, and lock and bolt must have rusted long ago.

My teeth were chattering as if I had had a fever, but Ilse's presence reassured me at once, and I began whispering to her breathlessly an account of the whole scene. I noticed how she started and colored, but Ilse was Ilse still, and never uttering a word she laid her basket beside the fire-place and began to take out the turf and pile it up symmetrically. But when Heinz came in she raised her head. His respect for her sharp eyes was well founded, for she fixed them with an annihilating glance on his terrified face.

"You are a murderer, Heinz," she said. "For years I have watched that not even a penny should ever be seen at the Dierkhof, and now what a hubbub these charming pieces have raised."

Tears sprang to my eyes. In spite of my faithful and minute description, my candid confession of my own error, Heinz got all the blame and bore it without one word of complaint or retaliation. I threw my arms round him and hid my face in the sleeve of his old coat.

"Yes, comfort him, your Heinz!" said Ilse. "You stick to each other like burs." But the sharpness had already vanished from her look and tone.

She took up the lamp and began to search about for the paper, but search as she would she could not find it.

Hitherto I had never heard a sound proceed from my grandmother's apartments, and I had always instinctively avoided it; but now loud sobs and deep sighs from a rough and passionately excited voice issued through the curtained window.

"She is praying," whispered Heinz to me. But it was not on her knees, for she paced up and down with such violence that the window curtain was swayed by it and the floor trembled beneath our feet.

"Bring a light," she called out suddenly.

"A light," replied Ilse. "I have taken the lamp in already," and she ran toward the narrow passage which led to the eastern side of the sitting-room and which looked out on the garden where the hall door was.

Not long after she came back, evidently calmer. But almost at the same moment the pump-handle began to work, and the sound of the water as it poured into the trough became audible.

"There was a cloud over her eyes," Ilse replied in

answer to my anxious inquiries. "We shall have another night of it," she muttered to herself, while she removed the litter from the dining-table and carried back the box of letters to the next room.

So, then, she often passed bad nights with my grandmother. That was an unpleasant discovery to me, for my own healthful, happy sleep had prevented my ever guessing that anything could be going on in the house at night. Suddenly I remembered how often I had found Ilse worn out and exhausted in the mornings, but her headaches, from which she suffered severely, were always supposed to be the cause.

I folded my arms on the table and laid my head down on them. My courage had so utterly failed and I was so frightened that I felt as if some dire calamity would fall upon the Dierkhof during the night. Mechanically I listened to Heinz' footsteps as he once more made the round of the house. No doubt he wisely avoided the orchard, for though the pump-handle was quiet just then, my grandmother was no doubt lingering about. Just at the spot where the orchard extended into the moor at one angle she would stand for hours gazing over the boundless expanse.

"Go to bed, child; you are tired," said Ilse, stroking my hair.

Up to this moment, despite my happy freedom, I had been the idlest, most worthless being on earth, and I now suddenly awoke to a consciousness of it.

"No, I am not going to sleep," I replied, endeavoring to assume a determined air. "I am seventeen to-day, Ilse, and I am not going to be sent to bed while grandmother is so hard for you to manage."

I had jumped up and was standing near her.

"So," she answered dryly, looking down sideways at me. "That was all I wanted, that you too should stand in my way. Now I know how a grown-up woman looks. Her head is a little higher than the dining-table and she peeps into the outer world like a chicken which has just broken the shell."

"I am like nothing of the kind, Ilse," I answered rebelliously, but somewhat taken down notwithstanding, for she never exaggerated.

"Well, I don't know what else you want," she con-

tinued, "so absurd. Grandmother is out in the orchard and in another hour will be as fast asleep as any of us. One thing, however, I will tell you, seeing the lamp burning too long in the hall excites her."

Without another word she took up the lamp and my fit of heroism was at an end, for I had seen by Ilse's last speech and the energetic toss of her head that I dared not make any further reply.

I called out "good-night" to Heinz, who was just locking the house door, and dutifully followed Ilse to the corner room, where we both slept.

V.

It was hot and close in our room. Ilse had already closed the shutters, and had she possessed curtains doubtless they too would have been drawn.

"Here, you giddy thing, are your new shoes," said she, pointing under the chair which stood by my bed. "If it had not been for Heinz they would have lain out all night and the storm would have swept them into the river."

I felt my cheeks flush at sight of the unfortunate hob-nailed pair, and just at the same moment, too, my eyes fell on the old engraving of Charles the Great, now lighted by the lamp in its position on the wall. The portrait seemed as if it were looking at me, but I turned my back on it and pushed the shoes still further under the chair. I wanted never to see them again or to be reminded of the strangers whose appearance had brought with them such a train of annoyances and painful sensations into my hitherto solitary, simple life.

Ilse did not leave the room till she saw me in bed. But with a heart full of anxious forebodings even youth cannot rest, so I slipped on my clothes again, and taking down the shutter from the west window, which overlooked the orchard, I sat down on the foot of my bed close to it. The thick darkness in my room lightened and I grew more tranquil; at all events the fear of specters, which had haunted me, was dispelled.

Noiselessly I raised the window. A low mountain-ash which grew near the wall, beneath whose shelter, to the

delight of the birds, it annually bore luxuriantly red berries, now swept with its boughs the panes of my window. Under cover of this green shade I could sit unnoticed and overlook the meadow and garden in the faint light. Ilse had spoken earlier in the evening of a terrific storm, but I had never seen the starry heavens more cloudless in their beauty as they spanned the wide moor. The delicious warm night air played around me with scarce a breath; not a leaf stirred to break the death-like stillness which possessed all the time a latent life for me; no longer, indeed, in the spectral tread of gigantic steeds, which bore the gray hill king and his followers through the land—that purple-and-gold dream had been finally dispelled by the unmerciful ax this morning—but I knew that in every little twig of heather millions upon millions of tender blossoms were preparing to burst before long into the golden sunlight, to have their pallid hues deepened into purple by its rays. This very day, too, I had been to the top of one of the tallest of the oak trees, and there in the old magpie's nest I had counted four eggs; life was stirring warm within there also, and took no heed in its busy growth when it was day or when it was night till the tiny bill pecked at the shell and demanded light and space for two little eyes. I knew, too, that far away from the distant borders of the wood the deer were approaching with silent footsteps, coming to taste the fragrance of the haide air, whose meadow and herbage scents perfumed the Dierkhof too.

My pulses had become gradually calmer. Unconsciously I had fallen back into the smooth, peaceful mode of thought habitual to me and had again resumed the interests which hitherto had fully sufficed to fill up my simple life.

Within the house all was so quiet that I could have heard the clank of Mieke's chain against the wall. Ilse's assurance had been well founded, and she might at any moment return lamp in hand. Hi, how quicky I was on my feet at the thought! In two minutes more I should undoubtedly have been hopelessly engulfed in the enormous feather-bed had not the banging of a distant door set every post and pillar in the Dierkhof shaking.

I was in the very act of shutting the window, when, just under it, appeared my grandmother's gray head, com-

ing round the corner, and passed in a fearful proximity to mine.

"It is burning, here—here!" she groaned, rushing past, holding both hands pressed to her head.

I did not hesitate to bend out and look after her, but heard her stop almost immediately, and her wide outstretched arms came within reach of my view.

"Then it was my anger kindled it," she went on, in a louder voice of solemn pathos; "and it will rage to the lowest hell, and will consume the land in its growth, and set the very foundations of the hills on fire!"

Slowly she took her way through the oaks to the orchard nook. The spot was not far distant, and I could see her plainly, though the sky with its streaks of gold formed the only background for the outlines of her powerful form. She had thrown off her dress, the long sleeves of her chemise hung from her shoulders, and the tangled mass of her gray hair fell down her back.

What she said there, addressing herself to the silent, noiseless haide, I knew not. It seemed to me as though all the curious words used by the professor were here brought into compass and flowed like a stream in a peculiar singing rhyme. Suddenly the murmur broke into a half-smothered cry. My grandmother turned swiftly round, and the restless feet recommenced their wandering with double rapidity. I thought she was making for the well, when all at once she came against an oak, staggered back, took one more run, and then sank helplessly down, suddenly and completely, as though overcome by invisible hands.

"Ilse! Ilse!" I screamed aloud. But she was there already, endeavoring with Heinz' aid to raise the fallen one. Both had no doubt been watching my grandmother from the orchard gate. I sprang out of the window.

"She is dead," whispered Heinz as I approached him, and he dejectedly let the lifeless form sink, the weight of which must indeed have been formidable.

"Be quiet!" commanded Ilse in a choking voice. "Up, use your strength—forward!" And taking my grandmother under the arms, she raised her from the ground with superhuman strength, while Heinz supported her feet.

Never shall I forget the sight they presented as they

stepped panting across the hall, the unconscious one's gray hair sweeping the flags, upon which, scarce an hour earlier, the money had been flying about beneath her powerful tread.

I ran before to open my grandmother's door, but was obliged first of all to push aside a folding screen which protected the entrance, and by which it was thoroughly sheltered from the profane gaze of the passer-by. I had never been allowed near this room, not even as a little child; and notwithstanding all my mental anxiety and fright, it seemed to me at that moment as if I had a peep into a new world, though a very gloomy one. Never but once did I receive a similar impression. It was upon entering an ancient, dismal church decked with faded grandeur, hung with pictures of martyrs, and filled with that indescribable mixture of cold exhausted air and stifling incense perfume.

My grandmother was laid on a bed which stood in one corner; it had curtains, old-fashioned green silk curtains embroidered with delicate flowers in gold. How they rustled as they were drawn back, and how awful was the effect produced by the blue face with closed eyes as it lay under the harsh dark green!

Heinz was mistaken—my grandmother was not dead, but lay there breathing with difficulty. She did not move, but as Ilse addressed her in tones of soft entreaty, such as I had never heard from her, and as she pronounced her name, my grandmother raised her eyelids for one moment and looked conscious. Ilse put bolster and pillows at her back, thus putting her in a sitting posture, which seemed to relieve her, and by degrees the low strange noise she made in breathing decreased.

During this time Heinz had already gone in search of a doctor. For this purpose he had to run to the next village, and from thence dispatch a carriage to a place another two miles distant to bring the doctor, so that three or four hours might elapse before medical aid could arrive.

My attempt to assist Ilse was rejected. She drew my hands back, with an anxious glance at the sufferer, but gave me permission to remain.

I curled myself up at the foot of the bed on a little bench, half-hidden by the curtains, and there gazed about

the strange apartment, half-dazed. It was the largest in the house and like a saloon in breadth. My grandmother had very probably removed one of the partition walls for the purpose of obtaining this unusual degree of space. The walls were hung with tapestry embroidered with huge figures. One especially attracted my attention. It was a child's form, of life size and with a lovely face full of melancholy and gentle patience—it was the young Isaac as he lay bound upon the altar. The tapestry was very ancient and partially moth-eaten, so that Abraham's tall, commanding figure wanted one eye and that arm which was raised aloft ready to accomplish the awful sacrifice. Along the wall were ranged, with stiff precision, rows of high-backed chairs covered in blue-flowered velvet and looking much like a collection of sullen old graybeards. Later I learned to value these as all carved out of the finest wood and of great value; but at that time I saw nothing in them beyond terrific-looking heads of fabulous beasts staring at me from every nook and corner.

The dark coloring and still darker corners of the room were thrown out into even stronger relief by the two lamps which burned brightly on the table, thus "making darkness visible." Dark was the carpet beneath my feet and almost black the low, oppressive ceiling, and nothing relieved this universal gloom save an occasional gleam of light from the naked flesh of the tapestry figures, which age had blanched to whiteness, and one solitary spot where a soft radiance shone as though the white dove of peace were hovering near—this came from a silver luster filled with wax candles and suspended from the ceiling.

As the anxious hours passed by, which I spent near the bed, the sufferer seemed to get better. She looked about her, drank some fresh water, and her speech suddenly returned.

"What has happened to me?" she inquired in an altered voice.

Ilse bent over her without replying—I believe grief robbed her of her voice—and stroked her hair and forehead tenderly.

"My good old Ilse!" she murmured, making an effort to raise herself; but it was in vain, and her eye fell with a slow inquiring gaze upon her left arm.

"Dead!" she half-sighed, letting her head fall back upon the pillow.

This exclamation went through me with a cold shudder, and involuntarily I gave a start which made the sofa cushion slip and shake the curtain.

"Who is in the room?" inquired my grandmother, listening.

"The child, gnädige Frau—Lenore," replied Ilse, hesitating.

"Willibald's child—I know her. She runs about the moor with her feet bare and sings on the top of the hill yonder. I cannot listen to singing, Ilse."

Full well did I know that. Never had I dared to utter a note at the Dierkhof—and yet I loved to sing! My soul seemed to me to soar away into the far distance upon the tones that issued from my heart. So I sang in Heinz' little cabin till the small windows shook, or else on the hill-top, but I little fancied that my grandmother could hear that at the Dierkhof.

I had risen and approached near, trembling as I did so.

"Small, like her mother," she said to herself, "and the same large eyes and cold, narrow heart——"

"No, grandmother," I said gently, "my heart is not cold!"

My grandmother looked at me in as much surprise as though till then she fancied my small self were quite incapable of speaking, still less of addressing her. Ilse drew back behind the curtain and signed to me to be silent. No doubt she feared that my unexpected appearance might give rise to fresh excitement on the part of the invalid. But my grandmother remained quite calm, her eyes fixed on my face. These eyes, of which I had always stood in such awe, were very beautiful. There was indeed an uneasy gloomy expression in them, but yet in their depths lay soul and depth of thought.

She at last broke the silence by saying "Come to me!"

I went up to the bed.

"Do you know what it means to love a person?" she asked me, her ordinarily cracked and toneless voice taking a sudden depth of tone.

"Yes, grandmother, I do. I love Ilse so much—I cannot say how much, and Heinz too."

Her lips quivered slightly, and with an immense effort she stretched out her right hand to me as it lay on the quilt.

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked.

"No"—not any longer I was about to add, but I swallowed the last words and bent over her.

"Then give me your hand and kiss me on the forehead."

I did as she desired, and, strange to say, as my lips touched the dreaded face and I felt my hand gently clasped in the great cold fingers a new and blissful sensation stole over me. I felt myself in my own place; the mysterious bond of blood-relationship between grandmother and grandchild made itself felt, and overcome with this sudden discovery I sat down on the bedside and slipped my arm gently under her head.

"Flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood," she softly murmured, gently closing her eyes.

All this time Ilse stood behind the curtain, weeping bitterly.

A death-like silence once more reigned around, broken only by the low groaning and irregular breathing of the sufferer and by the incessant ticking of the old clock in its high wooden case. Its large, shining dial-plate stared at me like a specter, and the swing of the pendulum, in its regular rise and fall, seemed to my excited fancy like the heaving of an invalid's breast.

Thus passed a long and anxious period. It was on the stroke of one o'clock. At that moment Heinz opened the outer door and entered, accompanied by another person; so then, contrary to all expectation, he had brought the doctor with him.

Ilse looked relieved and signed to me to make room at the bedside. I drew my arm, therefore, gently away, and let the invalid's head fall softly back on the pillow. She appeared to sleep on and gave no sign of having heard the hall door open and the men come in.

Suddenly the old clergyman from the nearest village made his appearance in the middle of the room, dressed in full canonicals, while Heinz remained standing respectfully in the background, hat in hand. The old man's venerable form dressed in black, and prayer-book in hand, was a solemn and a touching sight. Ilse, however, started forward as though she had seen a ghost and beckoned him back, but too late. At the same moment my grandmother, as though conscious of the intruder's gaze, opened her eyes.

I shrank back, terrified at the sudden alteration her features underwent, smooth and peaceful as they had so lately been.

"What does the black-coat want?" she groaned.

"To bring you comfort if you need it," replied the mild old man, without noticing her rude speech.

"Comfort? I have found it already in an innocent child's heart, in the love that she gives, without inquiring. What is your belief or what will you give me in return? Lenore, my child, where are you?"

My heart trembled at those longing tones, and I stepped hastily to the head of the bed, that she might be able to see me.

"You cannot bring me comfort," she continued; "you who have driven me out into the wilderness where the sun scorched my very brain. Not one drop of healing balm did you offer me on that dreary path which, according to what you preach, will now end in hell! Ye intolerants, ye boast of walking humbly before God, yet all the while keep the stone ready to fling at your neighbor, and presume to pass sentence over the very grave of the departed, who is already, at that very moment probably, standing before his Judge! Ye false prophets, ye boast of praying to the God of boundless mercy and of goodness, and yet account him as the author of murderous battles; a stern and jealous God, as do the Hebrews, whom ye style the accursed! Highly do you honor him, and yet make him partaker of your human infirmities, your revenge, your love of despotism, your cold and heartless barbarity. Your Mediator put the olive-branch in your hand, but you have turned it into a rod."

The pastor raised his hand as if to interrupt her, but she continued with unabated vehemence.

"And with this rod you have stricken me and driven me out of your paradise by declaring that my father, the Jew, who gave me life, and the Jewess mother that bore me, are both accursed to all eternity. Man, my father was one of the wisest of human beings. He had collected and stored up an inexhaustible fund of knowledge—and that is all to be lost in hell, and the narrow-minded, who never thought, but only believed, will reach the kingdom of heaven without difficulty, though there the highest requisites are truth and light. And my father," she con-

tinued, "he gave his bread to the hungry and let not his left hand know what his right did. He hated the sins of lying, covetousness, and pride; forgave his enemies and never sought to revenge himself for what was done to him. He loved the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind, and yet must be condemned to the fire that is not quenched for evermore because water was never poured on his head. Well, well, I will go there too. Where he is, there will I be also. Take back your baptism! keep your heaven! You sell it too dearly, you tyrants in black coats!"

With the deepest pity written on his face the aged man stepped nearer, but no propitiation was possible there.

"Leave me—I am prepared," she said sharply and turned her face to the wall.

VI.

THE clergyman left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it. I followed him involuntarily, for convinced as I felt that some great wrong had at one period been done to my grandmother, I felt none the less deeply grieved for the old man whose hand had been laid in blessing upon my head in church. He was gentle and kind and did not belong to those who had driven the unhappy daughter of the Jews to madness. He had come willingly and without a murmur at the dead of night, the dear old man, to bring Christian comfort to a sufferer.

"Pastor," said Ilse in the passage outside, "you will not reckon this against her. She allowed herself to be baptized, and he who did it was good and Christian-like as you are, and she held fast to Christ. But then came one—he will have to answer for it. He was over-zealous and was too familiar with the words 'cursing' and 'damnation.' Yes, he said, all the deep misfortunes of the family were so many tokens of the wrath and punishment of God; and so at last this robbed her of her reason. Oh, may he have to answer for it!"

"I do not judge her," said the old man mildly. "Too well I know how much precious fruit has been lost thus in the Lord's vineyard through this mistaken zeal. The

lady has suffered much. God will be merciful. I am only sorry I cannot give any comfort where I would have done so with all my heart; but it is contrary to my habit to rush in with the unsolicited aid of the Church to a soul struggling in the bitter pangs of death and hell. Go in to her," he added, stroking my hair kindly; "she will miss you. Would I could put into your young mouth all the comforting words of faith which would bring peace to her troubled soul!"

I returned to the sick-chamber, while he, after drinking a glass of water, left the Dierkhof without waiting to rest.

I heard my grandmother, while I was still outside, repeatedly asking, "Where is the child?"

"Here I am, grandmother," I replied, flying toward the bed. She was quite alone; Heinz, whom we had left with her, having gone away, probably because having taken upon himself to bring the clergyman he was now afraid of Ilse's wrath.

"Ah, there you are, my little brown dove," said she tenderly, and sighing, as if relieved. "I thought you too would now have left me and gone off with him in hatred and contempt."

"You ought not to have thought so, grandmother," I exclaimed eagerly. "He sent me back to you and is inexpressibly kind. As for me, I don't know the meaning of hatred and contempt."

"That means you love everybody," she said, smiling faintly.

"Oh, yes; I have told you that already—Ilse and Heinz, Spitz and Mieke, the good old pine on the hill yonder and the blue sky above——"

Suddenly I stopped, ashamed of myself. What I said was untrue; this complete, perfect love for all the world was mine no more! This very day I had been a wrathful, unseemly creature—should I say so?

I was again seated on the bedside and she held my hand in hers; the fingers grasped it as though they would never unloose it again—and in this position she gradually sank to sleep. But now she had spoken with so much energy and life, and I was so utterly inexperienced in sickness, that her appearance never once suggested the idea of exhaustion to me. Happening, however, to lay my other hand caressingly on her wrist, where I knew the pulse ought

to beat regularly and without pause, I was filled with the deepest alarm as it gradually dawned upon me that the hand was become colder and the pulse fainter, so that but an occasional throb at distant intervals was all I felt under my fingers.

"We are like clay in the hands of the potter," she suddenly murmured. "What are we, our life and all our glory? But Thou art our Father," she groaned aloud, "and we are thy children. Have pity on us as a father upon his children."

She was silent again, but an inexpressible anxiety seized me, and I would have given the world to see her eyes open once more. I pressed my lips to her forehead very gently. She started up, but looked tenderly and lovingly at me.

"Go and call Ilse," she said feebly.

I sprang up, and at that moment, to my extreme relief, a carriage rattled over the stone pavement of the yard. A few minutes afterward Ilse entered with the doctor.

"The doctor is here, gnädige Frau," she said, conducting him to the side of the bed.

My grandmother's face once more resumed that firm strained expression, and she offered the doctor her right arm that he might feel her pulse, while she watched him all the time keenly.

"How long do you give me?" she inquired in an abrupt, decided tone of voice.

He was silent a moment and endeavored to avoid her eye.

"We will make an effort——" said he, hesitating.

"No, no," she interrupted, "don't give yourself that trouble. That is already dust!" and with a shadowy smile she glanced at her left side. "How long do you give me?" she repeated in a sharp tone of unmistakable energy.

"Well—an hour at the most."

The tears started to my eyes, and Ilse fled to a window, pressing her face against the panes. My grandmother alone remained tranquil. Her eyes were directed toward the silver luster in the ceiling.

"Light the candles, Ilse," she desired, and while her orders were obeyed she turned to the doctor.

"I thank you for coming," she said, "and wish to make

one more request of you. Will you have the kindness to put your signature to what I shall dictate?"

"With all my heart, madam, but in case you refer to your last will and testament, let me remark that it will not stand without legal——"

"I know it," she interrupted, "but there is no time for that. My son must and will be contented to receive my last will in this form."

Ilse accordingly brought writingm-aterials, and my grandmother dictated as follows:

"I bequeath to Ilse Wichel the Dierkhof with all it contains——"

"No, no," exclaimed Ilse. "I will not suffer that."

My grandmother cast a severe and reproving glance at her and continued utterly unmoved—"as a proof of gratitude for her unbounded devotion and self-sacrifice. I further bequeath to my grandchild, Lenore von Sassen, whatever government securities I possess, and forbid anybody, no matter who it may be, to raise a claim to such."

Ilse had risen and was looking at her in amazement. The invalid pointed to a press. "There must be an iron box in there," she said. "Take it out, Ilse. I have entirely forgotten how much it contains."

Ilse opened the press and laid a flat iron box on the table; a rusty key was in the lock.

"It is long, long since I opened it," murmured the sufferer, raising her hand to her head wearily. "All has been dark to me. I know it. What year is it?"

"The year 1861," replied the doctor.

"Ah, then much of what is there may have become valueless," she lamented as he opened the box. At the invalid's desire he counted the papers which filled the box to the brim.

"Nine thousand thalers,"* he announced.

"Nine thousand thalers," repeated my grandmother in a satisfied tone. "That will be sufficient to prevent all want. There must still be a little wooden box within the other."

Ilse shook her head over this sudden mental lucidity which now took up the thread so long snapped asunder. The doctor took out a tiny wooden box—it contained a string of pearls.

* Three shillings to a thaler.

"The last remnant of the Jacobsohns' glory," she whispered sadly to herself. "Ilse, lay the string of pearls round the little brown throat yonder. It suits your face, my child," she said to me, while I felt a shudder pass through me at the cold, smooth touch. "You have the eyes of your mother, but the features of the Jacobsohns. That necklace has witnessed many scenes of domestic happiness and peace, but it has also shared the curse of bigotry." She gasped for breath. "I will sign it now," she added, after an exhausting pause, which made her anxious to conclude.

The doctor laid the paper on the bed and placed the pen in the stiffening fingers. Troublesome beyond description was this last earthly act, but the name Clothilde von Sassen, born Jacobsohn, stood at the end of the document in tolerably firm, clear characters, to which the doctor added a few words as witness.

"Do not cry, my little dove," she said, consoling me, "but come to me once again."

I threw myself on the bed, unable to utter a word, and kissed her hand. She charged me with greetings for my father, and lifting her clouded eyes from my face, she fixed them on Ilse, saying markedly:

"The child must not be lost in the lonely haide."

"No, gnädige Frau, leave that to me," said Ilse in her usual abrupt manner, though her lips trembled and tears hung on her eyelashes.

Once again the cold, nerveless hand passed caressingly round my neck, then suddenly but gently my grandmother pushed me away and looked out of one of the windows with such a singular expression one might have fancied her soul sought to wing its flight already into the great eternity.

"Christine, I forgive!" she called aloud twice into the far distance; then she was ready, prepared. Evidently tranquilized, she laid her head back on the pillow, looked upward, and began in a solemn, fervent, though failing voice: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God. Blessed be the name of His Majesty——" The voice sank into a whisper and slowly and softly she laid her head on one side.

"Forever and ever, amen!" filled up the physician in the place of those lips now closed for evermore.

With tender hand he closed her eyes.

VII.

I WENT out. This was my first heavy sorrow. How petrified I felt in the face of that inexorable "gone forever" which in the midst of life seems almost inconceivable.

I had attached myself to my newly found grandmother with all that enthusiastic tenderness common to youth; I had tasted of that exquisite feeling which said the devotion of my young heart was longed for; and now the thought that I had not shown my grandmother half the love I really bore her tormented me. I had meant to have assured her how deeply I would love and honor her when she recovered, but instead I had wasted the precious hours in talking over my love for all the world—my love for that world which had so deeply wounded her and of which she doubtless cared least to hear—and now she was dead and I could never tell her all this. Too late! What utter helplessness lies in those crushing words!

I stepped through the orchard door into the open air. A strong wind, still laden with the dews of night, swept over the haide. It blew the great white cloud away which hung over the bog and turned it to a lacy curtain, behind which the rising sun began to glow. The murmuring tree-tops became gilded and the little gable window of the Dierkhof began to glimmer.

The blades of grass sparkled in the morning dew, and those on which my grandmother had ruthlessly trampled the previous night were all erect once more. The windows where she lay, and which I had never before seen more than ajar, were now thrown wide open. I swung myself up on the window-sill and looked in. The room was empty. The curtains, which by daylight were an emerald-green, were pushed back, and let the air play around the bed and around the troubled face which for many a weary year had not worn so peaceful and calm an expression.

There lay the powerful form, covered with a white cloth, and only recognizable by the splendid gray plaits which hung over the bedside.

A fly which had been disturbed came buzzing near me, and the lights still flickered in the luster: these were the

only sounds in the great, huge chamber; even the clock stood still.

On the other hand, the busy outside world was all astir once more; the hens cackled, Spitz gamboled among the poultry, and Mieke lowed and turned to the hand that milked her. The cat came creeping along the roof and gazed with her green eyes at a little bird which was perched carelessly on the mountain-ash bough. I leaned forward and drove her away. Then overhead, on the roof, the pair of storks were dressing themselves and preparing to go forth in search of their breakfast. All just as usual! In front of the house alone were tokens of something new and terrible—a horse was grazing there, and the doctor stood with folded arms looking over the low hedge which inclosed the yard at the haide, now one sparkling sheet of dew and golden sunshine.

The dusty little chaise which he had brought with him stood unharnessed at the door, and there was Ilse, self-possessed and active as ever. She had laid the table neatly; cups and saucers stood on the white cloth, and she was preparing coffee for the doctor.

I went up to her greatly excited.

"Ilse," I said, "how can you think of such things at such a time?"

"Are other people to starve because I am unhappy?" she inquired reprovingly. "You have seen your grandmother die this night, and yet have failed to learn that people may keep their heads under the worst of circumstances."

Deeply ashamed, I put my arms round her neck, for her face, which was only then fully turned toward me, looked quite numbed with sorrow, and not a trace of color remained in her cheek; but for all that her hands were as busy as ever and not the smallest duty was overlooked.

The doctor and the servant who had driven him both came in. I went out of the way again in front of the house.

The Dierkhof ducks were all standing at the lattice door, their bills individually directed toward the haide and all longing for the moment when, this barrier removed, they could make a rush and plunge headlong into the river. One only was struggling with a lump of white paper—the very letter which my grandmother had flung away so

unceremoniously the night before and for which Ilse had made such a close search. It had swept out at the open door. I opened the gate for the ducks and rescued the wisp of paper from destruction; it was in a bad state; the dirty carriage wheels had rolled over it and the duck's bill torn it nearly to rags.

Seating myself on the bench under the ash, I smoothed out the paper on my knee and set about piecing the torn fragments together. Much was wanting, and in addition the handwriting was very hurried. With great trouble I succeeded in deciphering the following passages:

"I have never burdened you because I considered it as a point of honor to go my own chosen road independently. 'The lost one' has done everything to prevent a shadow from her career from falling on you. My own name has never once crossed my lips in speaking to others, neither have I ever made the smallest inquiry about you or my former home such as could give rise to a suspicion that I was connected with the Sassens. It would not have disgraced them, indeed, for, think as you will, I still repeat with pride that I have been called the wonder, the star of the age." Here a piece of the paper was torn away, but on the other side of the sheet stood, "But a heavy misfortune has fallen upon me. Where shall I turn if not to you? I have lost my voice, my precious voice. The doctors say that one of the German baths might restore it; but here I am empty-handed; through the dishonesty of others my fortune has been lost to the last farthing. On my knees I entreat you—you who are surrounded by comfort, who have never known want, stern want (I could tell you plenty about anxious, sleepless nights)—forget for once that I was undutiful and give me the means to rescue myself. What are a few hundred thalers to you?" Over the continuation lay the mark of the wheel, and the delicate characters were entirely effaced. The address of the writer, however, was still tolerably legible on the other side, and in one spot stood those two words which had produced such an effect on my grandmother—"Thy Christine."

Who was this Christine—this wonder, this star of the age?

The passage "on my knees I entreat you" had made a great impression on my simple, uncultivated mind. I

immediately pictured to myself one of those tall, slender young ladies whose portraits I had often gazed at in my story-books falling on her knees, while her hands were uplifted in earnest entreaty—and she had lost her voice; too, her precious voice! My hands went involuntarily to my own throat. How dreadful that must be, to open your mouth and to fail in producing a single tone!

Neither Fraulein Streit nor Ilse had ever appeared to give this Christine a thought, and yet she must have been very nearly related to my grandmother, for she had been her last thought. Only now did I thoroughly realize the meaning of that “Christine, I forgive!” In the depths of my soul and involuntarily it recalled the prodigal son who had remained within his father’s heart, the ever well-beloved one.

I put the letter in my pocket and returned to the hall. The doctor’s carriage was just rattling through the gate and turning off toward the left into the gloomy haide, while Heinz at the identical moment was approaching from the opposite side. It only then occurred to me that he had been hours absent. I went up at once to Ilse, who had accompanied the doctor as far as the door, and remained standing on the threshold. It seemed to me that my friend Heinz came forward with considerable hesitation. First of all he made the greatest piece of work about opening the wicket before he advanced to meet us; it was evidently very hard for him, but at the sight of our tear-stained faces he stood still bewildered.

“Well, what was his opinion?” he faltered out, pointing over his shoulder after the doctor.

“Oh, Heinz, you do not know,” I screamed aloud, but Ilse interrupted me sharply.

“Where have you been?” she inquired of her brother in a dry, harsh voice.

“At home,” he answered gruffly.

Heinz sturdy! I could not believe my eyes or ears; nevertheless there he stood, that ordinarily yielding creature, taking courage from the sound of his own voice, for he actually went so far as to meet Ilse’s antagonistic gaze boldly.

“So—and what took you home at such an hour? Did your birds want feeding?”

He looked at her anxiously and answered:

"Oh, je, feed birds at one o'clock at night—how could I be such an idiot? No, I was sitting between my own four walls, built by my own father's worthy hands. A pious motto stands over the door, and how then could I remain at the Dierkhof while a Jewess' soul was passing into eternity? Ilse, if my father only knew that you had been in a Jewess' service!"

"Heinz, if my father only knew that you had been in a Christian's service where you were nearly starved and frozen, where all day long you got nothing but kicks and blows!" replied Ilse angrily. "That is quite a novel style of wisdom you are displaying—and you got it over yonder," she said, pointing in the direction of a large village at the back of the forest where Heinz had formerly been groom.

"Yes, you are right," he replied, nodding his head stiffly and looking just as refractory as ever. "I did learn it yonder. The Jews are accursed to all eternity because they crucified our Lord. My master said so, and he was a rich man and had large estates, and the clergyman preached the same from the pulpit, and he must know best, else why was he pastor?"

Ilse looked keenly at the speaker, and advancing toward him with uplifted finger replied shortly:

"Now, attend to me. Once for all, it is not true that the Almighty will be everlastingly avenged for the Lord's death. If I thought so there would be an end to my faith, for he has himself told us, 'Bless them that curse you,' and yet would have failed to do it himself. It is true that every time I read of Christ's sufferings I am filled with a heathen's rage against the Jews, but against those Jews, mark well, brother Heinz, who lived at that time; for how could I be so inhuman as to nourish wrath against creatures who come into the world now as innocent children and are brought up by their parents in the old erroneous doctrines? Ah, Heinz, if any one did me a wrong and I wanted to beat his children for it, how would you like that?"

"That is only learning, Ilse, which you got from the gnädige Frau," said Heinz feebly.

"No, I have not learned that like Bible sentences at school, but my own conscience has taught it to me and my own sound understanding," said she, pointing to her forehead. "At first I often talked, indeed, with my poor

lady, and have calmed her many a time after the 'men in the black coat' have done mischief. The Jews once crucified our Lord, but such as the pastor yonder [and she again pointed toward the distant town], they crucify him daily. Fire and sword and damnation do not make the kingdom of Christ attractive, and people are not to blame if they will none of it! Now you know my opinion, and I tell you still further that you ought to feel ashamed to your very heart's core, you ungrateful creature. Have you not for years past eaten your daily bread at the Dierkhof?—and I fancy it agreed uncommonly well with you, though it was Jew's bread—and now you must forsake the old mistress in her dying hour. Go home and read over the chapter about the good Samaritan."

So saying, she turned away back into the house.

And she was right, quite right! Every word she uttered seemed to lift a burden off my heart and give a vent to my irritation. I was thoroughly disgusted, and yet I could not help pitying the unfortunate offender as he stood there with downcast eyes, not venturing to cross the threshold. How could it be possible? This tender-hearted man, who would not have seen an animal hurt, suddenly betraying this black spot in his disposition, an incredible degree of hardness and want of mercy, thinking himself not alone right, but thoroughly justified in it as a Christian.

"Heinz, you have played a bad part," I remarked in a hard, cold tone.

"Ah, princess," he sighed, while tears filled his eyes, "who is to set it right then? It is a deadly sin to act in opposition to the pastor, and now Ilse thinks ill of me because I obeyed him."

"Ilse is always right—and that you should have known," I replied in a voice from which the former severity had all vanished. Immature as were my powers of thought, I was still able to discern that there was not a single fiber of cruelty rooted in Heinz' heart, but that it was simply grafted into it—how abominable!

My eyes involuntarily swept the sky. The flood of light which had now risen pained me no more. On the contrary, it was as balm to my wounded heart, and I realized for the first time, after witnessing death in the night, what a marvelous prophecy is that of the Resurrection.

I took Heinz' hand in mine and said:

"Come in with me; you cannot remain standing in the yard. Ilse will be good-tempered again already, and my poor dear grandmother, she has forgiven you long ago. She is in heaven."

"God knows how sorry I am for the old mistress," he murmured, and let me lead him like a child into the passage.

Ilse was outside in the orchard. She had just put the bucket under the pump and was about to raise the handle, but with the first sound she let it fall, with a face white as ashes.

"I cannot stand that," she groaned aloud.

She came in, sat down, and hid her eyes in her apron; but that did not last two minutes.

"What a silly thing I am," she said, straightening herself up and smoothing out her apron over her knees. "There, I am longing to see my mistress at the pump once more, where she used to cool her poor, hot head, and I ought to be thanking God instead that she is lying quiet within, released from all her sorrow."

"Ilse, was Christine the cause of this sorrow?" I inquired timidly.

She looked sharply at me.

"Ah, so," she replied after a little reflection; "you heard about it, too, last night. Well, you may know she brought as much sorrow on her mother as a rebellious daughter well can."

"And my father had a sister, then?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"A stepsister, child. Your grandmother was first married to a Jew, who died early—while that same Christine was still in long clothes; two years afterward your grandmother and the child were baptized and she became Frau Rätlin von Sassen. Now you know all."

"No, Ilse, not all. What crime did Christine commit?"

"She ran away secretly and joined a set of actors."

"Is that so wicked?"

"Running away was, of course—you ought to know that yourself; but about the actors, as I know none I cannot tell whether they are good or bad. Have you done now?"

"Ilse, don't be angry, but one thing more I want to ask you. This Christine is very unhappy—she has lost her voice."

"So, then, you have found that letter and read it," she said in her most icy tones.

I nodded my head silently.

"And you are not ashamed of yourself!" she said. "You reproach me for doing my duty and my business in these hours of sorrow, and are yourself taking the opportunity of peeping into letters which do not belong to you. Do you know that that is the same as stealing? And besides, I don't believe a word of the whole affair. Now let that content you."

"No, that I can't. I am so sorry for her. Will you really send her nothing? Ah, Ilse, I beg of you——"

"Not one penny. She took away more than her own fortune the night she left her home secretly, and that used to torment that poor head too."

"My grandmother forgave her, Ilse."

"You needn't tell me that. A mother may well do so when she is scarcely any longer on earth; but to us who have witnessed those long years of misery and have all along acted honestly, it is something harder. Do you take everything for truth that is in the letter? She will come crawling on her knees—oh, yes, but not for pardon, not she. She has got on uncommonly well all these years without that; no, no, money is what she wants—money, dear money; it is worth while to fall on her knees for that."

How intensely must Ilse have felt all this to have spoken with such bitterness and fluency—the silent Ilse!

"And I may as well take this opportunity to let you know why your grandmother could not bear the sound of money. It can do you no harm to know how many a misfortune lies connected with such thalers as you saw yesterday for the first time in your life. Your grandmother was the richest woman in Hanover; her first husband had left her chests full of money; afterward, at her second marriage, she brought herself to the tremendous sacrifice of renouncing her faith; that she dared not retain, but the same objection did not hold good with regard to the money. It did not last long, and it became very evident that not for love of her, but for her gold, had the second husband chosen her. In time, however, her whole capital disappeared—he understood how to make it fly."

"And that was my grandfather, Ilse?"

The rich carmine rose to Ilse's brow and covered her whole face.

"There you are," she said in a tone of vexation. "You give a person no peace, and then, of course, these things come to light. But this much I say, child, you need not come to me again about this Christine—she is dead to me, remember that, child, and you need think no more of the deceiver. Such things are not fit for your young head."

She pushed a cup toward Heinz, who sat silent and humble near, and poured him out some coffee, but did not vouchsafe him a glance. Then she went to the pump once more, and I saw her set her teeth as she worked the handle, but she would do it, and the water flowed until the pail was full.

Well, though Ilse was always right, still in this I could not obey her. I could not choose but think of the unfortunate singer. She was my aunt. My aunt! How sweet and pleasant that sounded, though far too sedate for the charming vision I had conjured up, and yet she was older than my father—more than forty-two. Oh, how awfully old! Yet all availed naught. My fancy was busied in dressing up its interesting creation. Was she not a singer?

I fled to the solitary hill yonder to ease my overburdened heart, and gazed with melancholy eyes on the beautiful blue sky above. Did she see me, my dear, dear grandmother, as I sat sorrowfully there? She at least was not angry that I thought of Christine—she had forgiven her!

VIII.

• FOUR weeks had elapsed since my grandmother's death. I was present when she was laid in the cemetery in the village near. The old pastor had prayed for the departed as earnestly as though his favorite penitent lay at his feet, and even Heinz seemed to have forgotten that the few planks inclosed a soul once made a Christian and gone back again to its Judaism, for he wept bitterly. The brilliant summer flowers were blooming now afresh on the newly made hill; they rose out of the dark ground, like sweet dreams of the sleepers yonder, and nodded with their bright eyes at the outer world.

This was just the loveliest season at the lonely Dierkhof. It lay in the center of a peach-colored bed. The haide was just bursting into full bloom, and the bees, which had hitherto been luxuriating in the fields of rape and buckwheat blossoms, intoxicated with delight, began to cover the boundless plain, now literally dropping honey. They began, too, humming the old monotonous haide melody beneath the homely roof. My favorites, the blue butterflies, too, were skimming about in such masses that it seemed as if the blue summer sky were falling around in fragments. On the sands green-and-golden beetles were running to and fro, and in the meadows and garden-plots around the splendid admiral and peacock's-eye fluttered gayly.

In former days I should have been chasing the butterflies, and having caught them, been enjoying the marvelous beauty of the colors on their wings for a time, then letting them fly away once more. Many an hour had I thus passed in the haide—it was different now. I passed much of my time in my grandmother's room, which, with its antiquated furniture from the Jewish days, possessed a mysterious fascination for me. Everything stood in its old familiar place—not an article had been moved; the old clock had been regularly wound up, and that nothing might be wanting to cherish the illusion that the departed was still in the room, Ilse had reset the burned-out candles in the silver luster.

She opened a box or two for me also; most of the compartments were empty. At the time of her flight from the world my grandmother had cast away every incumbrance, and every trifling remnant which gave me an insight into that vanished time possessed, of course, a double interest for me.

Some dresses which my grandmother had once worn (but never in the haide) hung in a press. One day Ilse took down one of these, a black woolen one, and having turned it began to cut out; she had learned dress-making in town, and this was her especial pride. I was considerably alarmed when she begged me to let her try on this specimen of her powers—the thing looked like a strait-waistcoat.

"Oh, Ilse, not that," I remonstrated, shuddering as I tore at the tight band which nearly choked me, and felt

my unfortunate elbows so confined that I thought they must burst through their bonds and make room for themselves.

"Oh, you will soon grow accustomed to them," said she coolly, cutting away.

We were sitting in the orchard under the oaks, where I had brought out a table and chairs. It was burning hot out on the moor, but where we were settled it was cool and pleasant; the bees were humming, the magpies chattering in their nest above. I had my great brown straw hat in my hand, for which Ilse had sent to town fully five seasons ago. I was, by Ilse's direction, turning the pink ribbon, which had been the delight of my eyes.

Just then Heinz came up and laid a letter before Ilse.

My father had, on receipt of a telegram announcing my grandmother's death, written acknowledging it, and at the same time excusing himself from being present at the funeral in consequence of severe illness. Since then Ilse and he had kept up a lively correspondence, but what about I knew not, as I never saw a line. This much, however, I was aware of, that scarcely five days had elapsed between the last letter Ilse had written and the one she was in the act of perusing before my eyes.

"Nothing in it," she said, putting the letter in her pocket. "We are to set out the day after to-morrow—that is settled."

Hat and scissors fell from my hands.

"You will set out?" I repeated in a choking voice. "You are going off with Heinz? Going to leave me totally alone at the Dierkhof?"

"Oh, yes, the poor Dierkhof would look well so," she exclaimed; and for the first time since my grandmother's death a faint smile rose to her lips. "You silly thing, it is you that are going."

I stood up and pushed my chair back so violently that it fell with a crash.

"I am? Where to?"

"To the city," came the laconic reply.

At these words the sunny haide yonder and the venerable murmuring oaks seemed to melt into thin air, and the horrible, gloomy back room once more received me, with its damp, vault-like garden buried in the midst of four moldy-looking houses.

"And what am I to do in the city?" I gasped out.

"Learn."

"I won't go, Ilse, of that you may rest assured," I said decidedly, while hot bitter tears nearly choked me. "You may do what you like with me, but you will see that even at the eleventh hour I will cling to the door-posts. Have you the heart to send me away?" I shook Heinz, who remained standing there like a statue, open-mouthed, despairing. "Don't you hear?" I cried. "I am to be sent away. Will you allow that, Heinz?"

"Is it really true, Ilse?" he asked timidly.

"Well, did any-one ever see such a pair of children," she replied. "One would think I was going to cut the child's throat. Do you really think this kind of thing can go on her whole life long, Heinz—that the child is to grow up running wild about the haide the whole blessed day, coming home at night bare footed, with her shoes and stockings in her hand? She knows nothing and can do nothing, and runs away from a strange face just like a wild cat. There must be an end to that, so be rational, child," and so saying she drew me down on her knee like a little child. "I am going to take you to your father. Stay there two years and learn what you ought, and if at the end of that time nothing else will satisfy you, then you can return to the haide and we will all live together."

Two years! that seemed to me an eternity. Twice would the moor be in blossom, twice would the storks go and return, but I should not be there! I should be imprisoned within four walls, knitting stockings or writing copies and learning lessons by heart. I shuddered at the thought, and every nerve in my body rose in determined opposition and excitement.

"Bury me at once in yonder cemetery, Ilse," I said sullenly. "You shall not take me back to that horrible room."

"Nonsense," interrupted Ilse. "Do you think your father carried it with him? He has left that place long ago and lives now in K."

At this piece of information the curly brown head with the snow-white forehead again rose before me, and I saw the mocking eyes looking plainly at me. It came upon me so unexpectedly and always produced such violent emotion that the blood rushed to my temples.

"My father does not want me," I said, hiding my face on Ilse's neck.

"We shall see," she replied, with an ill-repressed sigh; but she raised her head at the same moment and pushed me away.

"Must it be? Ah, Ilse——"

"It must be, child; and now be quiet and don't plague my life out. Think of your grandmother—she wished it."

She returned to her sewing with redoubled energy, but Heinz put his cold pipe in his pocket and slipped out. Toward evening I saw him sitting on the great hill yonder; his arms were folded on his knees and he was gazing into space. I rushed over to him at once, and then the flood-gates of my tears, which Ilse's sterner presence had suppressed, broke forth with unrestrained passion. The blue sky above had probably never witnessed a parting scene of deeper sorrow.

Next day the sitting-room looked so wretched. A great wooden trunk stood in the midst and Ilse packed away.

"Look here," said she, pushing a packet of coarse colored bed-ticking toward me. "Isn't that magnificent? There is real substance in that. The woven stuff your grandmother slept in has always kept me in terror."

She pushed a bundle of remarkably fine embroidered linen material aside with a gesture of disdain.

"These new bed-covers you will take with you," she said. "I have laid them in by degrees since we came to the Dierkhof. Take care of them."

A whole regiment of those hard coarse stockings knitted from the haide wool were also packed up and filled a goodly space in the trunk. For years Ilse had been laying up stores for me which were now going to make their *début* in the world! Next followed gigantic feather-beds, which were made up into balls and presented a formidable aspect. A veritable cargo was mine!

All these preparations caused me the bitterest sorrow, and yet there were moments in which my young heart swelled with some indefinable emotion, some glad presentiment—some fair sweet hope—but it came and went like the lightning flash, and, strange *mélange* of thoughts, my eye fell each time shyly and inquiringly on my unfortunate shoes! They had grown nice and large for me now and

gave my feet ample room to move about in. I walked about heavily, endeavoring to calm my anxious heart with the downright certainty that the nails did not make half so much noise as four weeks previously. But it was no use; so I actually came to the resolve, in my dire necessity, to beg Ilse to buy me a pair of new shoes on the way. But how I suffered for it. She took one of mine off, and holding it up to the light she said:

"Such work and such soles you may look for long enough. They will serve you to dance in for two years at least. You don't want any new ones."

That settled the matter.

The morning dawned at last when I, in deed and truth, must leave my beloved Dierkhof! Before four o'clock I was already coursing over the dewy haide. With outstretched arms I gazed upon the rich heather blossoms, the misty marsh, and in my agony gave the good old pine such a shake that the few remaining needles of the past winter showered down upon my hair. Spitz had accompanied me and was bounding and barking away like mad; he looked upon all my wild motions as so much fun and frolic intended for his amusement. I plaited a gay wreath for Mieke's horns, but she was too sleepy and comfortable to low even her thanks or a farewell.

Then Ilse put the new black frock on me, and a snow-white muslin collar, taken from my grandmother's wardrobe, above which my dark-brown head looked something like a hazel-nut dropped on a small bolster. Over that came the huge straw hat, which Ilse had trimmed with black ribbon. I must have presented a marvelous appearance indeed, something like the little mushroom, with the great big hat, which I had always laughed at when reading.

After coffee, which I had swallowed amid a flow of tears, Ilse brought out a band-box and took from it with the greatest solemnity a violet bonnet.

"That was my Sunday bonnet in Hanover," said she, going to the glass and settling the silken structure carefully on her head. "One cannot go out without a bonnet in town."

I looked at her with respect. Naturally the term "fashion" did not exist in my vocabulary. I had no idea that beyond the haide there existed a power which com-

pletely subdues mankind and which makes him, in outward form at least, follow it at its will and pleasure. That, however, took nothing from the respect with which I regarded the pointed edifice before me; but it was evident that during its long seclusion in the band-box it had lost much of its color and brilliancy. Ilse did not appear to notice this. She tied the faded *pensées* over her stiff yellow hair, threw a large black shawl over her shoulders, and away we went.

Heinz and a peasant-boy drove the luggage to the next village. Gently, but firmly, did Ilse push me through the door, to which my feet seemed chained. I heard it locked behind me and Ilse chasing the ducks and hens which, cackling and screaming, seemed determined on following us. I heard Mieke's soft low from the barn and the wicket gate open and shut also, then I felt that I was driven from the paradise of my childhood on that same road which Fräulein Streit had once taken.

How I parted from Heinz I know not. That sunny farewell morning to this day remains enveloped in tears. I only know that I embraced that good, kind weeping form with both arms, and despite the huge brown hat buried my face in the old working-coat, and that he, surrounded by a gaping multitude of peasant-boys, hid his eyes in his handkerchief while I mounted the carriage which was to take us to the distant posting station.

IX.

It was noon when, exhausted and cramped, we reached K. after having traveled the whole night and part of the previous day in the railway. The novelty of everything around me had been quite overpowering, and now the sun shone perpendicularly over our heads, looking as if it would burn up the puffing train and the great rows of houses into very powder.

"To Dr. von Sassen's," said Ilse authoritatively to the two men who had loaded a small carriage with our belongings.

"I don't know him," answered one of the men.

She gave the number of the house.

"Oh, the great seed warehouse—Firma Claudius. Good," he replied respectfully and drove off.

A stifling cloud of dust enveloped us on the way between the town and the terminus, and it lay like ashes powder d over the green fields and chestnut-trees over our heads. Still, there was a breath of air to be met with occasionally, but in the streets that we were just entering a heavy, mephitic atmosphere reigned around. Now and then the narrow streets broadened and a monotonous little patch might be seen on which the sun played. Oh, the blooming plain at home, with the refreshing haide perfume and the cool, murmuring oaks around the Dierkhof!

"This is enough to kill one, Ilse," I groaned as she seized my hand and drew me hurriedly upon the footpath. A carriage was just wheeling round the corner.

Up to this time we had met scarcely any one. The noonday heat had made the streets empty and quiet, but suddenly a distant sound of drums and fifes became audible.

"Relieving guard," said Ilse, with a pleased smile—old Hanoverian memories were awakened, doubtless, at the sound. The noise came nearer and nearer, and all at once a crowd of people broke into the street.

"Hi—look at that!" roared a youngster, planting himself right before Ilse. "She was in the ark with Noah." And with a grimace he put his two fists together on the top of his head, in imitation of the bonnet's shape. Everybody laughed, and even the two porters grinned.

"Street-boys!" said Ilse contemptuously, tossing her head as, to my unspeakable comfort, we turned into a quiet street. "The people in Hanover are much more mannerly—there such a thing never happened to me."

Every nerve in my body quivered and I felt overcome with deep depression—Ilse, my venerated Ilse, had actually been made fun of! I pressed the hand which had been my guide and guardian to the present moment fondly against my cheek, and allowed my hot, tired feet to carry me mechanically further.

The sound of the band gradually died away behind us, and the men at last stopped in a retired, deadly quiet street, full, however, of handsome houses. We stopped before one built of stone. A number of windows on the ground-floor were defended with iron bars, and steps with

a handsome iron balustrade led up to the hall door, which was raised high from the ground. The ancient house, with its broad, massive front, no doubt was imposing; but the iron grating on the windows, the dark stone walls, on which no ray of sunlight fell, and the richly carved ornamented doors filled me with horror; and the large glittering brass plate stared at me like a dark, mysterious riddle.

"Now, Ilse, do you see, I was right about the back room," I exclaimed in a despairing tone. "Let us turn back."

"Wait a little while," said she, dragging me up the steps. The porters took the luggage on their shoulders and followed. Ilse rang. Immediately after the door opened slowly, and we were admitted by an old man into an unusually lofty large hall. It was paved in mosaic and the broad winding staircase in the background was also made of stone, as also the two immense pillars which stood in the middle of the hall and formed into splendid arches at the ceiling. These masses of stone shed a delicious coolness around, but tended also to give an air of gloom—a kind of "dim religious light," which did not allow one ray of the sun which was so fiercely beaming on the steps ever to enter there.

"Firma Claudius?" inquired Ilse.

The man nodded stiffly, while with evident reluctance he made room for the porters to pass.

"Dr. von Sassen lives here?"

"No, not here," he made rapid answer, at once barring the men's entrance with extended arm. "Dr. von Sassen lives in the Carolinenlust—you must go round the corner of the street to reach it."

"Oh, my," moaned Ilse, looking at me. "Are we to go out again in that frightful heat?"

"I am sorry," said the old man, untouched, "but the way is not through this house; and you," he said, turning to the men with the luggage, "ought to know that such packs as those are to be carried in at the back door."

Just as he raised his voice, scolding, a dog in the background began an accompaniment in barking. Some steps led up to a door a little further off, and on these steps stood a lady dressed in black and with a prettily trimmed cap on. She was wiping the dog's delicate little paws with a cloth; he had evidently been out walking.

"Let the people through, Erdmann," she called out kindly.

"But, Fräulein Fliedner, only look at the dust!" he remonstrated, regarding us as though we were about to pour out the ashes of Vesuvius on his elegantly polished pavement. "And if Herr Claudius happens to be in the back room and sees people passing through the yard, there may be a piece of work."

"I will send Dörte down immediately after with a broom, and as regards any blame in the matter, I will take that upon myself," she answered, reassuring him. "Besides, Herr Claudius is most positively not in the back room, as in five minutes he is setting out for Dorotheenthal."

She opened the door into the yard herself and beckoned us to come through the hall. A faint smile passed over her delicate face as Ilse strode by, nodding her towering edifice thankfully; but she turned away rapidly and ran upstairs, taking the growling dog with her.

"A sensible woman," said Ilse, much gratified as the door creaked and closed behind us.

The word "yard" had thoroughly electrified me. I at once expected to see poultry like those at the Dierkhof clucking about, but nothing of the kind was visible in the great empty square we passed through. Two large wings had been added to the front of the house, and a long wall running parallel had been erected at the back. A large gate opened out of the left wing, which was overlooked by the neighboring streets. Great piles of cases and the total absence of curtains or ornament of any kind to the windows of the back part of the house indicated that these were the business premises of the firm.

Just as we entered the yard a groom was harnessing a pair of fiery steeds to a pretty light carriage which stood outside the coach-house. Our porters went in at once by a door in the wall and we followed them.

"Where are the people going?" called a voice suddenly.

I drew my hat still further over my eyes and took care not to turn my head, for I at once recognized the voice to be that of the old gentleman in the brown hat, though it did not sound quite so soft as it had done four weeks before in the haide. So he was in the back room then, after all, and now there was going to be a row, just as the old man

had foretold. The two porters stopped at once at the sound of that almost military command and did not venture a step further. Ilse alone faced round resolutely.

"We want to go to Herr von Sassen's. May we pass through this way?" she inquired civilly.

No answer was returned, but the gentleman must have made a sign of acquiescence, for Ilse, without another word, opened the door and let the porters in. On this occasion, just like yesterday, Ilse was actually obliged to push me through the doorway, for I stood there literally petrified. My eye, accustomed to the uniform brown of the haide, with its one flower of reddish-purple, was fairly dazzled by the sea of color which spread over the scene before me. I was unable to grasp the idea that this mass of rainbow tints or delicately shaded lines were formed of nothing more than flower-blossoms of different sizes and closely grown together, but it gave me some perception how human fancy had been able to invent the wonders of the fairy-tales. This exquisite garden in the midst of the unknown world, which up to this had seemed to me so ugly and so dusty, was just like an oasis in the midst of the desert.

A bed of lilac heliotrope lay close to my very feet; its strong vanilla perfume scented the air and absolutely intoxicated me with delight. Forgotten were the hot, dusty streets and the disagreeable impressions of the journey, the horrible noise of the military band, the impudent little street-boys, and the grim gentleman in the "back room." My hat no longer felt glued to my head. I threw it up in the air.

"Oh, Ilse," I sang out, "how I should like to throw myself in the midst of those flowers and to let them smother me!"

"Would you, indeed!" she replied abruptly, but thought it advisable to hold me by my skirt.

The murmur of distant water and the hum of the bees were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the garden. The birds had retired into the cool of the bushes beyond, and every one was enjoying the noonday rest. Nobody was visible except one elderly man, whom by his dress I judged to be a gardener; he came out of a greenhouse as we approached and showed the porters the way to the Carolinenlust, for which Ilse thanked him. We

then came to a river, over which was thrown a light chain bridge. It divided the blooming parterre from the other side, which was thickly ornamented with shrubs, between which here and there clumps of fine trees were visible, closely shaven sward and trim gravel walks.

As we crossed the bridge a kind of terror came over me and I shrank behind Ilse. That laugh, that musical laugh which I had heard four weeks ago in the haide, echoed through the air, and well I knew that all my life long I should never forget it. Nevertheless it was from it I fled, for where the laugh was there must also the mocking eyes be of which I felt so terribly afraid. Ilse's broad form effectually concealed my small person, and in this manner we proceeded down shady walks and up cool thickets, loud laughter and the voices of girls chattering coming gradually nearer, until all at once we saw colored hoops trundling on the very path we had just entered.

One of the hoops went astray and ran into the bushes. A young, delicately formed girl and a slight young gentleman in a summer suit followed it, and with uplifted arms and mallets got deep into the thicket, where the hoop had disappeared. The gentleman was young Herr Claudius, and the girl with the elegantly shod, small feet who was beside him appeared to me quite insufferable with her silver laugh, though I had not even seen her face. I was in a strange mood, grumbling I knew not why, but delighted because I could now slip past without meeting the young gentleman.

I urged Ilse forward and saw many more young ladies standing about, but one among them was conspicuous above all the rest. She was tall and large, dressed in white, over which she had thrown a flame-colored jacket embroidered in gold. There was a boldness in her movements, mingled again with a kind of proud insolence, the effect, apparently, of conscious power and inward self-reliance.

"Bless my heart!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in mock horror as Ilse, preceding the porters, came within view, and then bursting into a mischievous laugh.

Ilse turned round consciously and took a look at the bedding, which was nodding so ludicrously over the porters' heads.

In a moment we were surrounded by the assemblage of ladies.

"My goodness, Lenore," said Ilse, "what do you keep pulling at me for and hanging to my skirt like a little child?" And she shook me off and dragged me forward beside her.

How awfully ashamed I felt! In one hand I had my hat and in the other the huge white collar which, pity knows how, had got loose from my throat. Had I been set in the pillory I verily believe I could not have been more thoroughly overcome with shame and distress than I was under the eyes of all these strange, curious girls.

"Oh, a little gypsy," exclaimed two voices at once as, deeply embarrassed, I lifted my head and looked up.

"A gypsy girl, indeed!" said Ilse, deeply offended. "She is Herr von Sassen's own child."

"What, the mummy has children!" exclaimed the tall young lady in the greatest astonishment, and an expression of suppressed amusement crossed her lips. The others, however, drew back a little and began to regard me suddenly with altered—I might almost say kind and respectful—looks.

Just at this moment the young gentleman joined the party again. I looked at my shoes. Their great thick points showed in all their hideousness upon the gravel path, and involuntarily I pulled and tugged at my black frock, in the fond hope of making it even a shade longer.

The young man advanced, tossing the hoop up in the air and catching it again with a light and airy grace, which the young lady beside him took great trouble to emulate. Suddenly his eye fell on me. He screwed up the brown eyes inquiringly to make sure and then advanced toward me.

"As I'm alive, it is the haide princess!" he burst out in amazement.

"Who?" inquired the tall young lady, opening her eyes.

"Oh, you know, Charlotte—the haide princess. I told you all about the barefooted little creature that ran about the moor like a lizard. Yes, a lizard with a princess' crown," he added, laughing. "What on earth, though, brings the little pearl-seller here?"

The indelicacy with which he criticised me in my very presence and the undisguised astonishment this young man showed at finding me in his garden upset the remaining spark of sense I possessed, but the term "pearl-seller" set my blood on fire.

"It is not true," I stammered. "I did not sell you the pearls. You know I threw your thalers on the sand."

Charlotte smiled and suddenly came toward me.

"Ah, how charming! The little thing is proud," she said, stroking my hair, but much as you might fondle a pet dog. "What do you think of the news, Dagobert?" said she to the young man. "The mummy has a family, and that nice little thing there is Dr. von Sassen's daughter."

"Impossible," he replied in the greatest amazement.

"And what is there so very extraordinary in that?" demanded Ilse. "Do you think because the little girl doesn't wear such things as those"—and she pointed at Charlotte's elegant jacket—"that she can't be the child of distinguished people?"

The young lady laughed immoderately. Ilse's cutting remarks appeared to amuse her.

"But how you do look, Lenore," scolded Ilse. "All you want now is to take off your shoes and stockings."

So saying, she once more bound the collar round my throat, smoothed my rumpled hair with both her hands, and tied my hat on. I looked anxiously at the girls standing by. In their presence I had become too well aware of how ridiculous my appearance must be, but none made a face; on the contrary, they looked as if a real princess had been making her toilet. Round Charlotte's mouth alone lingered an irrepressible smile.

"Unfortunate victim!" she said in a tone of the deepest pity. "But is the princess really going to stay with her papa?"

"Of course," replied Ilse. "Where else? But may I beg you will now let us pass? We are weary. Is that at last the Carolinenlust, or whatever the place is called?"

"I will conduct you thither," said the young man very politely. How he had changed his tone! Even his eyes, which had previously wandered with unmistakable amusement over Ilse's strange head-gear, did not venture on another mocking glance.

My heart swelled within me. What kind of man must my father be when his very name was sufficient to procure Ilse and me such respect?

The ladies remained behind, smiling farewell, while we followed the young gentleman across the gravel path into the grove of yew trees beyond.

X.

It was only a little way, through a soft green haze, yet I traversed it with a beating heart. Ilse stepped out bravely and never once looked round, but we were scarcely well clear of the thicket and the young ladies before the young gentleman bent suddenly forward, and looking into my eyes somewhat roguishly said:

“Are you angry with me still, haide princess?”

I shook my head. Strange that a few whispered words should make one's heart thrill thus!

All at once the Carolinenlust lay before us! It would not have at all astonished me had Frau Holle* beckoned to me out of one of those high windows and begged me to shake up her feather-bed and clean her rooms. A spell seemed to be over me, and the house before us was in no wise calculated to dispel the illusion. What did I know in those days of the *baroque* and Renaissance styles? The fairy scene before my eyes was unimpaired by any knowledge on my part of the stern rules of art. I only saw beautiful, soft outlines, looking as though they were formed of wax rather than stone, rising in the air. I saw pillars, columns, and cornices exquisitely united by festoons of fruit and flowers, between which the window-panes shone out here and there—in fact, a rococo castle on a small scale, such as the ornate style of the previous century alone could have produced. Its reflection shone in the clear waters which, surrounded by a cut-stone balustrade, lay at its feet. The pond and fan-shaped grass plots, ornamented with marble statues and stiffly trimmed yew trees, took up most of the narrow parterre, along which ran a broad path; but it soon again became buried in the shadow of the trees. Like a pearl floating on green waves did the little castle stand out amid the forest trees which reared their tall forms in the background. While we were still near the thicket a pheasant ran almost over our feet, and in the shade before the door a peacock was strutting about, displaying his brilliant plumage, while an

* From the Goddess Holda, or Hulda, who in the early heathen days was regarded by the Germans as the special guardian of their agricultural and household affairs. Her name is still retained in the traditions of North Germany under the form of Frau Holle.

ash-colored crane stood on one leg immovably by the pond, its long strange neck stretched out dreamily. As we approached he came forward in the most ludicrous manner, and began dancing and bowing, as if he was the master of the ceremonies—wonder upon wonder for my unaccustomed eyes!

In one of the open rooms on the ground-floor the porters deposited our luggage and were dismissed. We then ascended the steps. We reached the *bel-étage* with high doors around, which, strange to say, had great official seals pasted on them: large pieces of white paper were laid above the lock of the doors, like a finger raised to enforce silence.

In the second *étage* we halted. The young gentleman opened a door there, showed us in, and with a friendly nod withdrew, closing the door noiselessly behind us.

A deadly tremor suddenly came over me. At home I had been convinced that my father did not want me; that I was simply a burden he would gladly think of as safely settled in the haide. The universal astonishment my appearance created here tended to convince me that he had never by one syllable acknowledged his child's existence. And now, there I stood in his very room, importuning him, as it were, and looking into that world in which he lived and moved with terrified eyes. And how strange and incredible all around me seemed! The walls of the room into which we had been ushered were covered from the floor to the ceiling with books; as many books, it appeared to me, as there were heather blossoms on the haide. There was only room left for four windows, hung with green curtains, and for two doors. The door to the left stood wide open and led into another large room with a skylight. Through a high dome-like ceiling the sun's rays came pouring down on a long row of portraits of men; on one threatening-looking manly form swinging a club, but also on some lovely female portraits clothed in soft rich garments.

In one of the window-niches stood a writing-table, at which sat a gentleman writing. He had not remarked our entrance, for while we hesitated a moment before advancing the scratching of the quill never ceased. It caused me a nervous shudder. I know not whether it was the peculiarity and novelty of our position or a similar feeling

to that which oppressed me, viz., fear of my father, but Ilse, the strong-minded, decided Ilse, actually hesitated one moment; but recovering herself immediately she took my hand, and leading me to the window said:

“Good-morning to you, sir. Here we are.”

To me it seemed as if this sonorous but slightly trembling voice echoed like thunder against those silent walls.

My father raised his head from among the heap of papers surrounding him and stared at us; then, as if electrified, bounded up from his chair.

“Ilse!” he exclaimed in unmistakable alarm.

“Yes, sir,” she replied quietly. “It is Ilse; and that is your only child, whom you have not set your eyes on for the last fourteen years—a pretty long while. Small wonder if you passed each other without recognizing one another.”

He was silent and passed his hand over his forehead, as if it cost him a tremendous effort to collect himself and remember what brought us there. He pushed back my hat very gently and looked at me, while I, with some inward alarm, thought to myself I had never seen such a thin, hollow face as his; but he had my grandmother’s fine eyes.

“So you are Lenore?” he said softly, kissing me on the forehead. “She is small, Ilse,” he said, “smaller even than my wife was”—and he sighed. “How old is the child?”

“Seventeen, sir. I wrote you that twice already.”

“Ah, so,” he replied, again rubbing his forehead and then clasping his hands. He was the very picture of a man who had been wakened suddenly from a dream to some startling reality.

“You must be tired, my child. Excuse me for having kept you so long standing,” he said, addressing me in a tone of the most finished politeness. In the middle of the room stood a table heavily laden with books and papers. My father pushed two of the arm-chairs which stood round it toward us.

“Take care, my dear Ilse, I beg of you,” he exclaimed in great alarm as she unsuspectingly set her knitting-basket down on an open sheet of paper. His thin hands trembled as he carefully removed the basket, and no mother ever gazed at a sick darling with deeper anxiety

than my father at that apparently worn-out old paper after he had freed it from this unusual disturbance.

I looked at Ilse. She did not move a muscle, evidently already acquainted with this peculiarity of my father's.

"Come, rest yourself a little," he said, remarking that I hesitated in taking a seat, "and by and by we will adjourn to the hotel."

"To the hotel, sir!" repeated Ilse coolly. "What should the child do at a hotel? It would cost you a pretty sum in the course of two years——"

"Two years!" reëchoed my father "What are you talking of, Ilse?"

"I am only speaking of what for the last ten years I have incessantly written about. We are here bag and baggage, and, once for all, I will not allow the child to be sent back to the haide to run wild again. Just look at her. She can scarcely read, much less write. She can climb trees and look for nests, but sew an ordinary seam or knit the heel of a stocking she cannot. I have tried with all my might to teach her, but could not; and she runs away at sight of a human face as if it were that of a cut-throat, unable even to say 'good-morning.' And that is Herr von Sassen's only child! Why, your wife would turn in her grave if she only knew it."

It did not occur to my father even at this flattering description to inspect my small person, but he ran his hands through his hair and exclaimed in absolute despair:

"That may be all quite right and true, but I ask you, Ilse, what can I do with the child?"

Up to this I had listened to the conversation silent and unconcerned, but now I rose and exclaimed, "How dreadful all this is!" my voice trembling the while with pain and agitation. "Father, don't trouble yourself. I will not appear before you again. I will return at once to the haide, and if need be run there every foot of the way. Heinz is there and will be delighted at my return, and I will be industrious now, my father, you may rely on it. I will sew and knit. You shall see, I will never, never more be a burden to you."

"Be quiet, child," said Ilse, standing up quickly, but overcome with tears.

I was already in my father's arms! He took my hat off, threw it on the ground, and drew my head gently on his bosom.

"No, no, my child, my poor little Lorchén; that was not what I meant," he said caressingly. Strange to say, my words were the first thing which seemed to put him rightly in possession of the subject. "You shall just stay with me. Ilse, isn't her voice just that of my wife over again? Hasn't it just the same silver bell-like tone? No, she shall stay with me—she shall not return to the haide; but, good Ilse, how am I to set about it? I am only a guest here myself for an uncertain time. How can I set about it?"

"Let me settle that, sir," replied Ilse. She had recovered all her fluency. "I can spare a week from the Dierkhof quite well, even if Heinz does make some blunders in the mean while, and I will arrange everything. Besides, the child didn't come empty-handed."

She drew a packet out of her basket and handed it to my father; it was my grandmother's will.

I raised my head from his breast and delivered the last farewell message of the departed.

"I hope she did not die out of her mind, my poor mother?"

"No," replied Ilse. "She was as much in her senses as in her best days, and set her house in order before she left the world. Just read that. The lawyer, indeed, was not present, but she thought you would respect her last will as much——"

"Of course, of course."

He unfolded the paper and ran his eye over the first few lines.

"I am glad of that, Ilse. The Dierkhof belongs to you now as a right."

"Do you really mean that, sir? Well, indeed, if I were in your place I should just think, 'Aha, then Ilse just bore with the old lady that she might sneak into favor and so get the nice place left her.'"

"That never occurred to me."

"But it did to me—and I will not have the Dierkhof; with your permission, that belongs to the little one. She must have a refuge, a spot of earth to retire to if the world does not please her. If I can remain at the Dierkhof, and that you will let me keep it in order for the rest of my days, that is more than enough. I would have torn the paper in pieces the very moment my poor mistress closed her eyes, but that there was more."

My father read on.

"What! she had some remains of her fortune still!" he exclaimed in the greatest amazement. "You always wrote that my mother lived entirely on her pension and on the scanty produce of the Dierkhof."

"And it was the pure truth, sir. At first a few extra thalers found their way in, but I know next to nothing of such matters, and from the time my mistress ceased to write her own letters not a penny ever came in. It was the doctor first explained to me that the little printed document must be cut off and sent in and then the interest will be paid."

"Did you bring the papers with you?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, with sudden embarrassment and reluctance. "But, sir, this I must say, they must not be disposed of in the same manner"—and she nodded significantly at the offending apartment—"as those great packets of money which my mistress used to send you from Hanover."

My father's sunken cheeks flushed and his eyes fell as though he had been detected in some guilty act.

"No, no," he answered quickly. "Don't be anxious on that point. The money belongs to Lenore."

"And you will put it by carefully, and every quarter-day—"

"Oh, Ilse, only not that," he broke in, horrified. "I cannot possibly meddle with money matters, my vocation occupies me so exclusively."

"Ah, don't vex yourself about that, sir," she replied, trying to calm him; "that will all come right." It did not escape me that she seemed to breathe freely once more. "But now, how are we to manage? We cannot well stay in this great room. I see neither drawers nor press—"

"I will conduct you to my own apartments immediately. Just one moment, while I finish this manuscript."

He returned to his writing-table and began rummaging among the papers, with his head bent in an attitude of reflection. He passed his hand at the same time over his forehead and stroked his thin, already gray beard; finally he sank down in the arm-chair, and in a few minutes after I heard the pen scratching.

Ilse, meantime, had stepped into the next room, and I followed her. I can just imagine what a figure we two

must have out in the midst of those antiquities, and I still distinctly remember my first impressions of those art treasures, of which I did not even know the name. They lay scatttred about, evidently waiting to be arranged. Marble statues might be seen here and there partially unpacked; Pompeian bronzes stood on the tables and antique terra-cottas—broken clay things painted in colors which I thought unworthy even of a glance—lay on the floor. In fact, damaged articles certainly were in preponderance. On the top of an unopened box lay a female figure without hands or feet—what did I know about a torso!

"Can one imagine it possible," grumbled Ilse indignantly, almost fiercely, "that nearly half the Jacobsohn fortune lies buried in that broken trash?"

It certainly seemed inconceivable. But just then I stood chained to the spot and experienced the first faint emotions of the magic power which art exercises over the soul. Leaning against the trunk of a tree lay a youth; his left arm was raised and clasped round an offshoot from the stem, thereby displaying his limbs, which were gradually yielding to a gentle sleep. I gazed for one moment on the beautiful face: the lips were parted and I fancied I could see the breath passing from them; the half-closed eyelids were quivering in the combat with sleep, and in the disengaged thin but muscular hand the delicate veins were distinctly visible under the yellow skin—life, hidden life, was actually beating there. I drew back.

"You are surely not afraid, child!" said Ilse. "It is gloomy enough, indeed—but just look at your father. I do believe he has totally forgotten we are here."

Just then a knock came to the door; my father never heard it, but wrote on. At a repetition of the knocking Ilse called out loud, "Come in." Just as at our entry, he started up and looked irresolutely at the servant in livery who had just entered and was approaching the writing-table respectfully.

"His highness the duke sends his compliments to Herr von Sassen, and requests the pleasure of his company at a conference this afternoon at five o'clock in the yellow chamber," said the servant, bowing low.

"Ah, so," said my father, running his hands through his hair. "I am always at the duke's service."

The servant glided noiselessly out again.

"We are here still, sir," called out Ilse as he proceeded to settle himself afresh.

I could not help laughing to myself, but a great weight had been lifted off my heart, for I began to understand my father. It was not from hardness of heart or indifference that he had forgotten his mother and me—it was that he lived in a different world. Now I felt sure of his love so long as distance did not come between us; and the chief thing at present was to overcome the nervous timidity I felt and to cease to be afraid of the sound of my own voice.

"Father," said I as courageously as ever my model Ilse did, and pointing to the sleeping boy while he advanced toward us with ridiculous embarrassment, "you will not laugh at me? But that boy must waken or take his arm down from the bough—the life-blood really is there."

"I laugh at you, my little Lorchén!" he exclaimed, evidently overjoyed. "Why, you have exactly hit upon my pearl, my treasure." And he stroked the yellow marble more tenderly than he had done my hair. "Look at it well, child; it is a noble work, bearing even a close resemblance to the masterpiece of the Almighty! There is but one such in the whole world, and that is here, here! What a discovery! Heaven knows how the dealer came by it. But this house contains inexhaustible treasures, and where do you think I found them? Precisely where this priceless treasure came to light yesterday: in the corners and nooks of the cellars, where they have lain at least forty years, forgotten and unpacked—an irreparable loss to science! Oh, those dealers, those dealers!"

All this did not sound exactly as if addressed to me, the child of the haide, who was casting my first timid glance into the domain of art and science; still, his conversation was far more intelligible to me than that of the professor on the hill, and the unexpected discovery at the dealer's became suddenly invested in my eyes with the same charm as the mystery of the giants' sepulchers.

Ilse kept looking sideways at me with an expression tantamount to saying, "So, she is beginning now," but she swallowed any such observation and went, as was her custom, directly to the point.

Pointing to her dusty feet she said:

"I should like to take off my boots, and if I could get a glass of fresh water I should be very glad, sir."

He smiled, locked his desk, and took us downstairs at once. Passing by, we saw into a room, where a pretty girl in a white apron was dusting the furniture.

"Fräulein Fliedner has had two rooms prepared for Fräulein von Sassen," said she respectfully to my father. I laughed in her very face; the "gnädige Fräulein von Sassen" had but yesterday taken her leave of the Dierkhof barefooted. "The master is indeed gone to Dorotheenthal," she continued, "and Fräulein Fliedner does not know how he may wish things arranged when he comes back, but she has made temporary arrangements for what is necessary; and I have also been desired to lay two more covers and bring two additional portions from the hotel."

My father thanked her and showed us into his very elegant sitting-room.

Shall I relate how strangely that feminine instinct within the wild, untutored child now began to dawn? The sudden wakening of the thousand tender feelings of a maiden heart as soon as tender duties call it forth? My hitherto miserably awkward, much-abused hands helped the potatoes at dinner and, if still somewhat shyly, laid them on my father's plate; when the sun annoyed him, shining full in his face, I sprang up and drew down the blind, and when at the end of an hour he prepared to return to his beloved library, I called after him to remember the duke's invitation for five o'clock and inquired if I might run up and remind him of it.

He turned round at the door with beaming eyes.

"Ilse, I thank you," he called back. "In my child you have restored to me the happy days when my little wife was near me. Lorchen, come up punctually at five o'clock. I am sometimes a little absent, and it has even happened, unfortunately too often, that an invitation has entirely escaped my memory."

He went off.

"Things are coming all right," said Ilse, thoroughly contented and stroking the elbows of her jacket smooth.

XI.

THE room which Fräulein Fliedner had temporarily prepared for me lay next those of my father, and a bedroom adjoined it. It formed the southwest corner of the house and had two windows with heavy, though somewhat faded, yellow curtains of damask. It contained a bed covered with a yellow quilted silk plumeau, newly sheeted bolsters and pillows, an elegant toilet-table, also hung in yellow, and against the wall stood a small inlaid wooden press supported on slight ornamental feet.

"That bed is of no use," said Ilse, seizing our own carefully stitched-up bags in her powerful arms and dragging them over the door-sill. "We have beds ourselves, and such beds!" She emptied the bedstead at once of its elegant bedding, covering herself thereby with the soft down she so despised. "How awkward that is!" she exclaimed suddenly, surveying the tiny apartment. "The bed stands exactly so as to place you in the draught from the window, while that little press occupies the snuggest corner in the room. Here, child, lend a hand—I must move it."

We pushed the press to one side. Ilse threw up her hands, exclaiming:

"Mercy on me! silk hangings everywhere, and behind the press cobwebs and dust enough to stifle one. That is nice housekeeping!"

It reminded me of the boxes downstairs which had lain forgotten forty years; the spiders galloping about on every side had doubtless been as long undisturbed behind the press. In addition, however, to the masses of dust and long-legged abominations, a small, almost invisible door came to light. Ilse opened it without further ado; a very narrow passage, scarcely two feet in breadth, with steep stairs, led to an upper story.

"There was a reason, then," said Ilse, "for the press standing there," and she closed the door. "We must replace it."

She set off in search of a sweeping-brush and dust-pan. And I—I softly opened the door once more. Who lived up there? Perhaps that handsome Charlotte? I did not intend to be inquisitive or to have listened—not at all;

Ilse couldn't for her life endure that. But before I was myself aware of it my willful feet were on the top step. I stretched out my neck as far as I possibly could, stood on my tip-toes, and gazed and listened into the darkness which filled the room beyond with all my might. Oh, my feet danced with the desire to slip in further! Ilse would have been astonished. I was as curious as a magpie. It was no doubt very dark around and I was afraid of ghosts; but behind me the consolatory daylight streamed in, and in the absolute certainty that Charlotte lived overhead, I mounted step after step. Near that merry, powerful young lady no ghost would venture to abide.

Suddenly a faint streak of light appeared just on a level with my eyes; it proceeded from a chink in a door which corresponded precisely with the one below.

Perhaps Charlotte might be sitting within at the window, and I might be able, unobserved, to steal a glance at her handsome face, at those splendid masses of hair coiled round the back of her head.

Noiselessly, as I imagined, did I open the door, but, oh me, what an abominable noise of creaking and rustling ensued; the unfortunate door groaned as though it had never been oiled since the year one. I let go the handle, and in doing so had very nearly fallen backward down the stairs, but the door fell slowly back and disclosed an empty chamber. A black silk cloak was hanging against the door and had helped to cause the rustling.

The walls were hung with rose-colored gauze, and it looked to me just as if the first faint streaks of dawn, such as I had often rejoiced over in the haide, were stealing in. Bouquets of roses lay everywhere strewn around; on the soft gray carpet, on the small embroidered chairs—on all these; they were, indeed, but the ghosts of roses, so completely had the sun robbed them of their color. Near one of the windows stood a dressing-table with silver appurtenances; with that exception and the chairs there was no furniture in the room. I entered cautiously. Pugh! there had been no cleaning there either for many a long day. "Nice housekeeping!" Ilse would have repeated there. And was it possible Charlotte really felt comfortable in that dusty, stifling atmosphere? A door to the left stood wide open, and my eye fell on two beds placed near each other under a dark violet canopy. Near one of

the beds stood a cradle filled with pillows, over which was thrown a green veil. Curious! who could be living there? Silence, deep, death-like silence pervaded the darkened chamber; here not alone were the blinds down, but the curtains also were closely drawn and all had such an air of want of use. Suddenly an idea occurred to me—the family were traveling.

For one moment my untrained conscience whispered to me that my little person had no business whatever there; but what of that? I would not take as much as a pin's point of their beautiful things—I would not lay the tip of my finger on them, and still further, that no damage might be done to the carpets I slipped off my nailed shoes and went in my stockings.

It was delightful to steal a peep into this strange dwelling, filled as it was with fabulous splendor. I felt just as if I were in Frau Holle's little castle full of silk and velvet, gold and silver. There was dust enough to clean away and beds enough to shake up. I wandered on alone through rooms and saloons totally deserted. If one of the monster spiders in the corners had fallen on the ground I should have heard it. That would have been something for Heinz. How he would have run! But I was not afraid—not in the very least, and if Frau Holle had really been sitting in the next room in her great easy-chair, with her great long teeth, I should just have walked up to her boldly and made my courtesy. It would not have required much courage for that—no, not for that, but—all at once I screamed aloud so that the walls rang again and hid my face in my hands. I had just opened a door and I was not alone, but it was not Frau Holle who sat within. A little black creature was advancing toward me from the opposite door.

Just as a month previously I had stood on the hill near the supposed Phenician, literally turned to a statue with amazement, so did I now; only on this occasion it was with shame and embarrassment. The rooms were not uninhabited.

How could I possibly excuse myself to the strangers that were now, no doubt, approaching? I awaited them with a beating heart. I thought every moment they would remove my hands from my face and begin to speak to me, but the death-like silence continued; not a foot-

fall sounded on the floor and the door opposite remained unshut. With a desperate effort I brought this horrible uncertainty to an end and looked up. The little black figure was standing exactly as before, just removing two brown hands from her face and then throwing back a mass of wild dark hair over her shoulders—exactly what I was doing myself; and now I laughed—laughed with all my heart. Was I really the scare-crow I looked yonder? I must examine closer.

The room was lined with mirrors; from the floor to the ceiling was pure glass. How astonished it might have felt at the extraordinary apparition which was reflected from every side! So, then, that was the haide princess which had been presented to the young lady to-day as the timid little lizard with the tiny princess' coronet marked on its forehead! Oh, Ilse, how dreadful were those far-famed stockings knitted of the haide wool in which my feet were incased, and of which a whole trunkful lay downstairs packed up by your own busy hands. I was expected to wear them all thoroughly; but what unshaken health, what a long life would be required for that! And my father had actually embraced that little monster and decided on keeping it with him as the "gnädige Fräulein von Sassen." He had not noticed how ridiculous the red ears had looked, peeping up from the huge stiff cravat, to disappear again as suddenly? It had not struck him that the enormous flowers on the black dress, which on my grandmother's tall form might once have looked imposing, on my tiny bosom formed a perfect shield of defense? I shook back my locks, laughing like mad, and proceeded on my explorations.

The next room I entered ran the whole length of the house, and on the north and west sides had three immensely large glass doors, which led into the open air. They were hung with blue. On the north side the color had held fast, but to the south it had turned into a dirty white. Here human life seemed breathing from every wall. Rosy, plump little children, with medals in their hands, were looking roguishly at me, and lovely female forms were showering down a perfect rain of flowers from the ceiling. Gold was profusely intermingled with the painting and with moldings of carved wood and arabesques. The furniture was white, picked out in gold and

upholstered in blue silk. It was a state room, yet evidently used as a comfortable ladies' boudoir. The furniture filled every corner and was pushed about carelessly, and before the center door stood a large writing-table. It was covered with china figures and all kinds of elegant things which I did not know the use of. I also saw a silver thing for writing, an artistic work of leaves on which stood an inkstand. On one of the leaves, arms, surmounted by a coronet, were engraved, and before the writing-materials lay also some paper stamped with a crest on which a delicate female hand had been trying a pen, and an innumerable number of times stood the characters, "Sidonie, Princess of K.," and here and there between the names of Claudius and Lothar.

I drew back. Could those, indeed, be actually princely rooms? Was it possible a real princess had written with the elegant gold pen so carelessly thrown down there? Had her delicate feet trod the polished floors over which my coarse stockings had been tramping? Had a woman's face gazed out of those glass doors? A painful shyness suddenly crept over me. I no longer tore at the handle of the adjoining roomdoor, but with trembling hands fumbled at the keyhole, through which I took a glance. Outside were the handsome stairs which the young gentleman had brought us up yesterday. So, then, I was actually standing behind one of those doors that bore the great seal with which the princess had sought to exclude every intruder during her absence. And yet even that had not availed, for there I stood, my inquisitive eyes inspecting everything which had purposely been shut up from strangers' gaze.

"That is the same as stealing," Ilse had said on discovering that I had read another person's letter. And was not my tarrying here just the same as peering uninvited into another's secret or breaking one of the seals on the door? I tried to assume a severe aspect, but I could not scold half so well as Ilse, and my scruples of conscience were not very deep. On the contrary, I experienced a mysterious delight in thinking that the doors were fast sealed, and that not a living creature, with the exception, perhaps, of an impertinent fly that had slipped through some keyhole, could move about here but myself—myself alone!

And now I thought I should like to try how the lovely princess had felt when she looked through those glass doors. I pushed back one of the hangings and saw something like a small cabinet in the open air, but without roof or cover—I had never before seen a balcony—and I thought how delightful it must be to step at once into the fresh air, out of the hot rooms, raised at that height from the ground.

The pond lay beneath; the deep blue sky of the summer afternoon was reflected in the calm water; in the middle stood grotesque stone figures, as if supported on a blue velvet ground. The soft greensward, the slender figures in stone irradiated by the sunlight, the gravel walks which surrounded the pond and, intersecting the grass plots, extended far into the wood—all this looked very pretty, if it had not been for the thick green curtains which inclosed it so stifflingly; those masses of trees which the eye could not surmount, which oppressed breathing, and which even strove yonder, toward the hills, to shut out the very sky. Was the beautiful princess not afraid that all these trees might one day approach nearer and nearer and finally inclose both her and the little castle in their green arms? How much more home-like was my own dear, level haide, with its strong, wild rush of wind which could roam where it would!

Perhaps on the balcony out there one might be able to catch a glimpse of the country beyond through a break in the trees. I was bold and giddy enough to turn the key in the door and to open it about a hand's breadth; the sultry summer air came in, bringing with it a delicious perfume from the garden. I might put my head out, at all events for a moment. Just as I did so, who should I behold coming out of the copse opposite but Ilse, shouldering an immense broom. I banged the door to, ran like one possessed back through the rooms, put on my shoes, and flew down the stairs. I had just shut the little door and thrown myself in as careless an attitude as I could assume on a chair, when Ilse came back.

"I've had to go off to the yard yonder," she said, "before I could find a broom. This house is just like one bewitched—closed doors, where you peep in and never see a human being, and a pretty trouble I've had! The housemaid would not give me the sweeping-brush from

pure respect. This infamous Sunday bonnet! I'd like never to put it on again. It was all along of it."

She swept every speck of dust off the door most carefully, turned the key in it twice, and pushed the press back against it. Then she proceeded to rip open the bags containing our feather-beds and to pile them up in the elegant bedstead one on top of the other. Oh, how badly the red-and-white covers looked near the yellow damask, and how small and thin did the fine cast-aside linen appear in comparison with my sheets, whose every thread I could count at a considerable distance.

But Ilse looked on proudly at the work of her hands; it was stout and durable—that could not be denied.

"Early to-morrow morning we will go to the front house," said she to me, meanwhile laying out a fresh white collar on the dressing-table. "From what your father said of them this morning they must be sensible people."

I pondered over this sentence in vain. My father had only expressed his indignation at the neglected boxes and had called the "sensible people" dealers.

"Perhaps I might speak to the master himself about you," she continued.

"For pity's sake," I cried, "do nothing of the kind, or I will run away and you shall never see me again—never."

She stared at me, and laying her finger on my forehead said:

"There must be something wrong here."

"Think what you please, but I will not suffer you to speak one word to the young gentleman about me."

"And who's thinking of the young jackanapes? The model of a young man that was playing with hoops, I suppose? Very likely, indeed!"

I felt my face burning—indignation, pain, and shame struggled together for the mastery. Ilse was really too remorselessly hard and rude sometimes.

"I mean the gentleman that called after us in the yard yesterday," she proceeded, quite unmoved.

"Ah, him," I exclaimed. "Speak to him as much as you please. He is old—dead old."

"So, then, those are really the people that were at the haide four weeks ago?"

I nodded my head.

"And the old gentleman gave you those unfortunate thalers?"

"Yes, Ilse."

I went to the window. I was on the point of making myself ridiculous; the tears stood in my eyes. Ilse knew, indeed, that I always cried when she was too hard on Heinz, but then that was quite another thing. I had loved him from my childhood, but what was this utter stranger to me? What on earth did it matter to me if Ilse chose to call him a jackanapes and a model of a young man? It was perfectly absurd, and yet for all that this detraction annoyed me far more and in quite a different manner from what it did when Ilse preached too roughly to my good old Heinz.

XII.

ON wakening next morning I felt very strange. The first thing that met my eye was the well-known quilt which always covered my bed, and I lay buried in feathers as deeply as at the Dierkhof. The crossing of the gravel path, my father's reception of us, the broken statues, and my ramble through Frau Holle's apartments—all this passed dreamily through my brain; on the other hand, I fancied the cocks outside must begin crowing every moment; I thought I heard the coffee-mill grinding in the fleet, and it surprised me that Spitz did not come and jump up on my bed to bid me "Good-morning." I looked out from the midst of the feathers. Oh, no, the morning light did not shine so richly through our thick shutters; on our planked floors lay no flowery worked carpet, and from the white-painted walls no flowers or gold moldings were to be seen. Yonder hung nothing save the time-worn, grave portrait of Charles the Great, the dear old picture! And it was quiet, so quiet around! I had not been stuck in a dismal back room; on the contrary, wherever I looked beauty and brilliancy surrounded me. So much the worse!

I did not feel in harmony with all these rare and beautiful things! But yesterday in the chamber of mirrors how I had laughed at my own appearance, and how must I

appear in the eyes of complete strangers? It would be far more suitable if I were stuck in a back room and taught fresh Scripture sentences and worked at knitting stockings till the inevitable two years of misery were past. I shook myself and buried my head deep in the pillows—that was a Dierkhof bed; there I was still at home. It looked just as strange in the midst of the silk curtains and painted walls as the sunburnt child of the haide.

Yesterday I had been overcome with the surprise occasioned by the various new impressions; I had fallen asleep in a species of intoxication; but the bright morning light had sobered my mind, and I felt once more like the wild mountain ash seeking to hide itself from the world's gaze in some sequestered corner.

All at once a little bird began twittering and singing an accompaniment to my dejected reflections. He was perched on the window-sill outside, and I pictured to myself with a kind of melancholy pleasure that he had come direct from my home in the haide; but the early calm was to my great surprise disturbed by another sound also. Behind the wall, where the press stood, a deep ringing voice began to chant a psalm tune.

At that moment the door of my sitting-room opened and Ilse appeared, pausing in a listening attitude on the threshold. She nodded "good-morning" to me and remained standing with folded hands.

"A pious man," she remarked as the verse came to an end and she came over to my bed. "So, then, more people than your father live in this house; and such people too! Yesterday I thought the house heathenish and bewitched."

She stopped, for the voice began another verse. The little songster on the window-sill had long been silenced; it had been outdone by the strong man's voice.

"Now get up, child," said Ilse after she had listened devoutly to the second verse. "That proximity is more to me than if I had found a treasure. That was a nice act of morning devotion. Now for our day's work."

With that she drew up the blinds and went away. I sprang out of bed. The water was sparkling and glittering in the sunshine; the trees and bushes were laden with dew, and over the grass plot strutted peacocks and golden pheasants. While I was dressing my neighbor continued singing without intermission.

"Oh," said Ilse, with a touch of ill-humor mixed with surprise as a seventh verse succeeded to the sixth, "he will weary the Almighty with his singing. He never made the precious morning hours for that purpose."

She had herself been pretty active already. She had had a kitchen opened for her and insisted, despite all protestations on the housemaid's part, on making the coffee herself. She said she absolutely could not drink it made by strange hands. The room was already cleaned, and the bed which she had made up for herself upon the sofa was cleared away. On the table stood a breakfast service sent by Fräulein Fliedner.

I knocked at my father's door timidly.

"Come in, my little Lorchén," he called from within.

I thanked God he still remembered my arrival and that I was not obliged to introduce myself anew. He drew me into the room and began to excuse himself for having left us so long alone yesterday, but he had been obliged to stay at the duke's till eleven o'clock. Ilse then told him that "afterward" she intended consulting Fräulein Fliedner as to what had best be done with me, to which he perfectly agreed. He considered Fräulein Fliedner an excellent and estimable woman, and would feel much gratified if she would receive his little daughter; he said he intended paying her a visit himself by and by and asking if she would do so. To-day, however, that was utterly impossible, as he was overwhelmed with business and must make use of every moment.

He was not half so absent as he was up in his library at his writing-table, and though he sometimes addressed me by my dead mother's name and occasionally inquired my age, still, with all that, I felt that he had become familiar with the thought of having his child with him, and that gave me fresh courage.

He kept my hand in his and I accompanied him to the foot of the stairs, for he was accustomed to take his coffee in the library.

A fine-looking old man passed us in the hall. His hair was white as snow and so was his cravat; his black suit shone like satin in the bright morning light. He bowed low, but with an air of stiffness and reserve, and his eyes shone with an expression of enmity and arrogance as they measured my father's appearance.

"Who is that?" I inquired as he rapidly but with great dignity strode round the pond. His unexpected appearance somehow produced an unpleasant impression on me.

"The old bookkeeper of the Firma Claudius," replied my father. "He is your near neighbor. "Haven't you heard him singing?"

A sarcastic smile played over my father's lips as he thus referred to the singer, who was just disappearing in the copse beyond.

Two hours later I was treading that same path by Ilse's side—the way to the front house. Ilse carried the box containing my grandmother's valuable papers under her great black shawl. She had added a pair of woolen gloves to her traveling costume and now looked quite festive!

The gravel walk was empty to-day, but an equal amount of life reigned in the garden. Wheelbarrows were creaking through the sand, between the beds people in working-blouses were busily occupied in making up bouquets from the flowers, and human heads kept popping up from behind rose-bushes and standards which looked after us in unfeigned astonishment.

As we approached the large hot-house the old bookkeeper made his appearance at the door. His hat was off and his white head literally shone. He was talking to the young man, who walked beside him, prepared apparently for going out. They did not notice us, though we turned almost immediately afterward into the same path, which led to the yard.

"They are light heads, she and her sister," said the old bookkeeper; "they fly high."

"Do you blame us for that?"

"And the nest they flew to is grown too small; I have long known that," continued the old bookkeeper, without remarking the objection. His voice was deep and agreeable, only his manner of speaking was so peculiarly broad and pompous, as if he himself considered every word of his gold.

"I will not just say that," replied the other, shrugging his shoulders, "but there is a great deal that annoys Charlotte and me which might be dispensed with, which hangs round our necks like a leaden weight in society, and principally keeps me back in my career. If my uncle could but resolve to give up this business."

He swung his elegant walking-stick round him and took the head off a splendid red carnation which was near with such a cut that the blossom flew far off on the gravel walk. I gave a little scream and put my hands up to my throat involuntarily, as if the cruel cut had gone through it.

The speakers turned round. My terrified face, but still more my gesture, awoke a sarcastic smile on the young man's face.

"So the haide princess can be sentimental too?" he exclaimed, baring his chestnut locks politely. "No doubt you regard me as a Vandal, a Goth, and what-not besides, and have passed sentence on me forever," he continued, with his smiling glance directed aside toward me. "There is nothing else for me but to raise the flower to honor once more," and picking up the carnation he stuck it in his button-hole.

"That won't make the poor thing whole again, though," said Ilse dryly as we passed by.

He laughed.

"Are you not called Ilse?" he asked roguishly.

"Yes, at your service," she replied, turning toward him. "Ilse Wichel, with your leave." Her tone was sharp and sounded as if she had pepper and salt on her tongue. What would her reply have been like had she known that he had associated her name in the haide with that of a dragon!

Where she found the courage, though, to look so self-possessed and indifferent into those brown eyes, just as if they had belonged to any young broom maker whom she would have dismissed from the Dierkhof with a piece of bread and an admonition—that I could not comprehend. Yes, Ilse was brave as a soldier; none could cope with her, least of all I, whose coward heart was even then beating with terror because I thought the bookkeeper was looking at me and measuring me from head to foot.

I think the young man was just about to tell his companion who I was, but Ilse did not stay, and nodding her head turned away, I following. The gentlemen followed slowly.

"There's a carriage coming round the corner," said the young man, suddenly standing still. "Yes, yes, it is the black horses. Uncle Eric is returning from Dorotheenthal."

They hastened their steps and reached the yard before us just as the pretty light carriage drove in. The old gentleman in the brown hat and blue spectacles was sitting in it. His appearance was just the same as in the haide, but he sprang up the steps with an agility one could not have expected from a man of his age.

"Good-morning, uncle," called out the young man. "Is that you, Uncle Eric?" exclaimed Charlotte, looking out of a window.

The old gentleman nodded at the window and gave his hand to his nephew and the bookkeeper. We passed by just then, but unobserved, for at the same moment the carriage drove in a strong, powerful-looking man, with a wallet on his shoulder, had also come into the yard and was just then holding his hat out in a begging attitude.

I saw the young man draw out his purse at once and prepare to throw him a large piece of silver, but his uncle pushed back the liberal hand.

"What is your trade?" he inquired.

"I am a joiner."

"Have you looked for work in the town here?"

"Yes, sir, and how? But I could find none anywhere; and anything would be welcome, God knows. I am tired of wandering about."

"Well, then, meantime come to me. I have work for you," and he pointed to the boxes lying around, "and I give good waggess."

The man scratched his head, somewhat embarrassed.

"Well, sir, that is very good, but I must first go to the Herberge again," he stammered.

"Then go," replied the old gentleman, turning short round.

"He has cut his wise teeth," said Ilse admiringly while we ascended the steps leading to the house; but I was disgusted. The beggar looked so miserably tattered and torn—and how roughly he had been turned away! Was it not enough that he had to beg at all! My heart had been grieved for him as I watched the powerful form so humbly bent before the rich man. Yes, the young gentleman had shown much more mercy and nobleness; without a question he had offered him alms. And if the joiner never came again who could suspect him on that account? Who would like to be thus inspected by those ugly blue spectacles?

Charlotte had no doubt seen us passing through the yard, for she came to meet us in the hall. A little lace cap, light and transparent as a cobweb, was carelessly thrown on the shining hair, and set off the oval form of a face which was young and beautiful, if perhaps a shade too full in its outline. A light morning dress fell in ample folds round her tall form; a small girdle confined it at the waist, which in no wise tightened or inconvenienced her well-developed figure.

"Is the haide princess coming to me?" said she kindly and taking me by the hand.

"To you afterward, *fräulein*," said Ilse, "but we must first see *Fräulein Fliedner*." And her eyes scanned the beautiful creature with much satisfaction. Ilse had a profound respect for size and strength, no doubt investing the heads which stood on such shoulders with her own determination of character. As for me, I seemed so small standing between these two giantesses as utterly insignificant, as perhaps a bit of thistle-down floating between two oak trees.

Charlotte laughed at Ilse's abrupt answer and opened a door. Thank goodness, the lady who came forward on our entrance from one of the deep window recesses was not so tall as my two leaders. *Fräulein Fliedner* looked just as nice as yesterday, in her silk dress and pretty cap and her elegant gold watch-chain fastened in her belt, and she advanced very kindly to meet us.

I sat down beside Ilse on a sofa covered in calico, while Charlotte threw herself into an arm-chair, taking the growling little *Pinscher* (who had just been trying to tear a piece out of my precious dress) on her knee and without ceremony administering a corrective.

Without further preliminary Ilse set about giving a sketch of my past life in its fullest details. My nonsensical head, my brown hands that were incapable of knitting, my unseemly inclination for running barefooted—these were the principal matters which two years' cultivation were to change. I sat like a lamb the whole time, gazing at the glass case opposite and the large ugly china figures in it, which seemed to nod an incessant affirmative of "Yes, yes, that must be altered" to Ilse's pithy discourse. Then I took to counting the innumerable keys on the wall. Goodness! was it possible that *Fräulein Fliedner's* elegant

looking head knew to what each of that fearful assemblage of keys, large and small, belonged? I grew quite afraid of a house which contained such a number of rooms locked and sealed. O for my beloved Dierkhof, with its one key for the hall door, which was often left open even at night.

"Willingly, most willingly will I take little Fräulein von Sassen under my care," said the old lady as Ilse stopped and laid the box of papers on the table; "but I think some things, especially the money matters, require grave consideration. I am of opinion you ought to ask Herr Claudius' advice——"

"Oh, for pity's sake not to-day, dear Fliedner," broke in Charlotte. "Uncle Eric has his working mania on him stronger than ever to-day, and is just in the humor to put the poor little thing into the back room and set her to weaving wreaths and dried flowers her whole life long."

I looked at her in terror.

"Yes, look at me, little one," she went on, holding up her large, white, carefully tended fingers. "I live in constant terror that these ten unfortunate creatures may some day be kidnaped for the service of that back room."

Ilse looked grave. With all the remorseless severity she showed she was really too fond of me to bear the thought of leaving me unhappy in a strange town. Yes, she had painted my ignorance in the darkest colors, but she must admit that she was herself to blame, for she had never had the courage to insist on my working or to put an end to my taste for running about.

"Don't be at all anxious," said Fräulein Fliedner, smiling. "Fräulein Claudius sometimes likes to exaggerate. The gentleman is strict, but not wanting in tact. You can speak to him with perfect confidence."

"Well, if you think so," said Ilse, evidently relieved. "I don't know why, but I feel a reliance in the gentleman, though I have never even seen his face; but the little one says she saw him in the haide four weeks ago, and that he is old, very old, so that he must have experience and knowledge of the world."

Charlotte threw up her arms and burst out laughing.

"Uncle Eric will be much obliged, your royal highness," said she; and Fräulein Fliedner regarded me also playfully.

"Take up your box and come with me," she said to Ilse.

So saying, she threw a mantilla over her shoulders, shook the white cuffs at her wrists, and smoothed the parting of her hair.

"I must be present too," said Charlotte, starting up and throwing Pinscher into his cushioned basket.

"In your morning dress?" said Fräulein Fliedner, with surprise.

"Oh, is it not fresh and pretty?" replied Charlotte giddily, drawing the lace cap a little more on her forehead.

The old lady shook her head and led us again into the dusky hall. She opened a door at the opposite end noiselessly.

XIII.

I SHOULD have liked above all things to turn short round on the very threshold, to convince myself that the July sun was indeed blazing in its meridian splendor. Oh, how cold and dismal it was behind those barred windows! Plenty of light, indeed, was reflected from the opposite side of the street, but it only made the shadows which the stone-work and heavy carpets caused all the deeper. With every breath one inhaled a thick heavy air, in which every flower of life seemed withered.

At a long table stood the old bookkeeper. He had drawn gray linen saving covers over his sleeves and was sorting out a heap of paper packets; several people were busy around him.

"Good-morning, Herr Eckhof," said Charlotte, offering him her hand in a familiar manner, like one student to another. He returned her salutation kindly, but to Fräulein Fliedner, on the contrary, he showed the same stiff demeanor as to my father.

We crossed the great saloon-like room and entered the adjoining apartment. Only one gentleman was present, although a number of desks were ranged against the wall.

The gentleman was sitting in a position so as to command the whole room and the door by which we entered. At our appearing he raised his head; then he rose, apparently a little surprised, and left the window where his writing-table stood. He had a thin, noble, somewhat pale face.

Charlotte hurried toward him in advance of us.

"In your morning cap, Charlotte?" he asked, fixing a pair of large blue, eagle eyes on the young lady's face. The bright color in her cheek deepened and spread over her brow.

"Oh, uncle, you are alone," she urged, letting her glance wander lightly through the room. "Don't be so particular this once. I must be present while you make an interesting acquaintance."

I had sheltered myself behind Ilse long since.

"That is not the gentleman who gave me the thalers," I whispered uneasily.

Charlotte's quick ear had caught the words.

"Uncle," said she, laughing like a sprite to herself, "four weeks ago a young lady saw you in the Lüneburger Haide and wishes now to be presented to the old, very old Herr Claudius——"

"Oh, that is of no manner of consequence," interrupted Ilse, "whether it is or is not the gentleman the little one saw. I want to speak to Herr Claudius, and you are he, are you not?"

He bowed his head, while the ghost of a smile crossed his lips.

And now Ilse once more began her account. She must have got it off as a preacher does his sermon, for it went on and on without a break, exactly in the same succession as to Fräulein Fliedner.

During this time I concealed myself behind the ladies and examined the gentleman more particularly. He had the same thin, delicately formed face as the old gentleman in the brown hat, and had the same voice; but that head could not possibly be his. Over the smooth youthful forehead grew a mass of fair curly hair which in the slanting light that entered shone like moonshine. Beneath this dead golden hair, in striking contrast, were his eyebrows, quite dark. Bold and marked, overshadowing the blue eyes, they gave the pale and distinguished, if not exactly handsome, face a look of power. I marked a slight frown gradually knitting them. Ilse's discourse manifestly displeased him; he had not the smallest wish to meddle in the matter. Occasionally he cast a sidelong glance at the folios lying open near him. It was evidently annoying to him to be disturbed, though he endeavored for civility's sake to show close attention.

"I can only advise you," said he coolly, taking advantage of a pause on Ilse's part, "to send the young lady to school as soon as possible——,"

"No, uncle," interrupted Charlotte, "that would be cruel to send this shy young creature, who up to this has enjoyed unlimited freedom, among those machines. Life at school is dreadful!"

"Life at school is dreadful, Charlotte?" he repeated in a tone of surprise. "And you have spent most of your life there hitherto. Why did you never mention this before?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"What use would it have been complaining?" came somewhat bitterly from her lips.

He looked severely and piercingly at her, but never uttered a word. At this moment the door opened, and the old bookkeeper, accompanied by a tall and very handsome young man, entered. The latter shrank from the presence of ladies and would have retreated.

"Come in," called out Herr Claudius, knitting his brows slightly. He took out his watch and showed it to the new-comer.

"It is very late, Herr Helldorf," said he coldly.

Charlotte had returned the young man's salute with a careless nod, but she colored violently at her uncle's words and her face showed deep annoyance.

"Excuse me, Herr Claudius, but one of my brother's children has been some hours seriously ill," apologized the young man in a trembling voice as he took his place at his desk.

"I am sorry for that. Is danger apprehended?"

"It is past, thank God."

Herr Claudius turned to Ilse once more.

"I do not see," he began, "of what use I can be in this matter. One cannot possibly expect that a man of Dr. von Sassen's vocation could undertake the education of—what you yourself admit to be—a rather wild girl."

"I would willingly undertake that myself," added Fräulein Fliedner.

"And I too," said Charlotte quickly.

"The chief difficulty is about the care of the little fortune left by her grandmother to Fräulein von Sassen," continued the old lady.

"Well, that, at all events, I should think her father could undertake."

"He absolutely refuses to do so," replied Ilse, "and I am glad of it, because"—she paused a moment in search of the right word—"well, because of all those broken casts and statues he is forever buying."

She placed the box on a table and unlocked it. Herr Claudius took some of the papers out and ran his eye over them.

"Many of those bills have fallen in, but the papers are good," said he, replacing them in the box. "So I am to take charge of the money. Do you wish the interest added to the principal?"

"Ah, yes, save as much as possible," replied Ilse. "But the doctor is very absent, no doubt, and it would be as well if you would occasionally let the little one have a few groschens for her own use."

"Where is the young lady?"

"Show yourself for once," said Charlotte to me, and before I was aware of it she had taken off my hat, smoothed my hair, and pushed me forward, much like a child who has to recite her birthday poem. This time I stepped forward quite unconcerned. I felt no shyness of this man with the quiet business air. I looked at him as unsuspiciously as at the old gentleman in the haide, and I really believe I should have plucked up courage to oppose him if he had said anything about his wreaths of dried flowers.

At that moment when our eyes met I saw recognition in his—he was the gentleman with the blue spectacles.

"Ah," said he in great surprise, "it is the singular little girl that never saw money."

"Yes, uncle," exclaimed Charlotte. "The haide princess Dagobert told us about; the wild little haide lark who threw your money at your feet and who won't be caged now without an effort. Now, little one, make your courtesies to the old gentleman."

Herr Claudius grew red.

"No nonsense, Charlotte," he said, as gravely and severely as to Dagobert in the unfortunate shoe affair.

"Are you satisfied that the money be intrusted to my care?" he asked me kindly.

It seemed to me so strange to be consulted thus gravely on a matter of property that I could not help laughing.

"Does it really belong to me, then?" I inquired.

"Of course," said Ilse irritably. "To whom else?"

"It belongs to me, then, like my hand, or my eyes, to do with exactly as I wish?" I inquired perseveringly, but almost breathless with the anxiety.

"No, not exactly. Your disposal of it cannot be as yet quite so absolute," replied Herr Claudius, resuming the mild and gentle tone in which he had spoken in the haide. "You are still far too young. If I undertake the charge of these papers you must also give me an exact account of every sum you ask me for."

"Oh, then it's of no use," replied I, sadly and dejected.

"Have you any special wish?" he inquired, bending down and looking at me in a questioning manner.

"Yes, Herr Claudius, but I would rather not tell it—you wouldn't fulfill it."

"So? What brings you to that conclusion?" he asked quietly.

"Because I saw you turn away that poor tradesman without giving him anything," I answered boldly.

"Ah, indeed! You wish to assist some one?" he said quite unmoved. My indirect reproof had evidently failed to make the faintest impression.

"But what is the little one thinking of?" said Ilse in amazement. "Whom do you want to assist, child? You don't know a creature on the face of the earth."

"Ilse, you know very well," I replied imploringly. "You know who is in great want just now and is very probably counting the hours till money comes from Han-over."

"Listen, Lenore: if you speak to me of that again everything between us is at an end." I had never seen her so angry as she was then. "Once for all, not a penny shall be given there."

"Then keep your money," I exclaimed passionately as the streaming tears blinded my eyes. "But I'll never take a penny either, never—that you may rely upon, Ilse. I'd rather go into the back room and make wreaths and bouquets for Herr Claudius all my days."

He stared at me.

"Who has told you of that room already?" he inquired.

My eyes involuntarily turned toward Charlotte, who colored slightly.

"Charlotte was jesting, Herr Claudius," said Fräulein Fliedner apologetically.

At sight of my tears the old lady had put her arm round me and drawn me kindly toward her. Ilse, on the contrary, exasperated my "childish folly" more and more. She laid her great hard-worked hand heavily on the lid of the iron box, as if to defend it from every such illegal assault, and said:

"Herr Claudius, never allow Lenore to send money to any one. I tell you, if she does it but once her whole fortune is as good as lost! I can't explain this to you, because it is an unfortunate family history which must be buried. Oh that such young lips should be the means of forcing one to speak of aught like it to strangers! To make a short story, it is about a relation who has brought disgrace upon disgrace upon her family, who has been cast off."

"Do you know this relation?" said Herr Claudius, turning toward me.

"No, I have never seen her and only heard of her existence in the last four weeks."

"She asks for assistance?"

"Yes, in a letter to my dead grandmother. But nobody will give her any. She joined play actors, Ilse says, and is a singer."

Herr Claudius grew suddenly red as fire and closed the books beside him.

"But she has lost her voice, her beautiful voice," I continued, anxiously seeking his eyes, which he turned away. "How dreadful it must be when one wants to sing and the tones refuse to come! Ilse, you who are so kind, how can you find it in your heart to refuse any one in such distress?"

"How much do you require?" said Herr Claudius, cutting short my passionate appeal with his calm cold voice.

"Several hundred thalers," I replied boldly.

Ilse threw up her hands in dismay.

"Evidently you have no idea how large a sum that is!" said he.

I shook my head and answered:

"Let it be what it may, I give it willingly—if she only recovers her beautiful voice."

"I believe you," said Ilse grimly. "Such a child does what she fancies and never thinks of the result."

"I will give you the money," said Herr Claudius to me. Ilse absolutely screamed.

"Be quite at ease. I will take care that Fräulein von Sassen is at no loss—I answer for it."

He turned to a safe standing near the writing-table and took out four bank-notes, which he laid before me. He then wrote a few hasty lines on a sheet of paper, and offering me a pen said:

"Have the kindness to sign this receipt."

"Ilse must do that," I replied. "I write too badly."

A smile passed over his face and he said:

"That would not be business-like. If I give you the money Frau Ilse's signature would be of no use. You can surely write your name?"

"Yes, but you will see what fearful crows' feet it will be."

I mounted the platform, seated myself on the chair he offered me, and looked over at Charlotte and Fräulein Fliedner quite pleased. They were both laughing. And how preposterous must my insignificant little form have appeared, stuck up in the important, honorable counting-house seat, before those huge folios above which my nose was scarcely visible. I joined in the laugh, and with such a light heart! I was so glad that I had succeeded in my endeavor to get the money for my aunt.

Herr Claudius leaned on the writing-table, so as to hide me effectually from the sight of the others. I seized the pen and began making an L.

"That won't do," I said, stopping as I saw he was watching me. "You mustn't look at my hands."

"So, is that forbidden? May one ask why?"

"Don't you see why yourself? Because they are so brown and abominable," I replied, without turning round and a little annoyed that he had compelled me to explain.

He turned away laughing and I began afresh—but what a number of letters there were in my name!

Suddenly the door opened and the young gentleman came in. The crimson carnation glowed on me like a ball of fire and I let the pen drop, covered my eyes, and felt as if the whole world encircled me.

"Uncle," he called out hurriedly, "Graf* Zell and I

*Count.

have agreed about the price—only 10 louis-d'or more than you offered. Are you satisfied? And won't you just give one look at Darling? I have had him brought into the yard."

"Herr Helldorf bowed to you, Dagobert," said Herr Claudius, pointing to the young clerk and making no other answer.

Dagobert nodded his head hastily and in undisguised amazement stepped over to the table where I was sitting.

"My goodness! A sentimental pink in your button-hole, Dagobert," exclaimed Charlotte. "What in the world procured it that honor?"

Dagobert laughed and looked over significantly at me. Ilse caught the look, which all must have observed, and said dryly:

"Oh, don't pretend that the little one over there has given you the flower. He cut the head off the poor thing before our very eyes with his stick, and he is now letting it die miserably in his button-hole," she explained, to the amusement of the bystanders.

The young man shrugged his shoulders and joined in the laugh.

"But, Uncle Eric, what is to be done, may I ask?" he inquired. "Will you come with me?"

"Patience. We must first bring a matter of business to a conclusion," said Claudius, again taking up his former position beside me.

The pen lay on the receipt. I had hid my face now entirely, for I felt it was fiery red.

"I cannot," I whispered.

"Go out and see that no accident happens in the yard," said he to Dagobert. "I will follow you in a few minutes."

The young man left the room.

"Now write on," said Herr Claudius, looking at my hot cheeks with a penetrating but kindly glance.

I put the last stroke to it and pushed it toward him. At the same time I seized his hand—the first time I had ever been guilty of such an act toward a stranger.

"I thank you," I said, with a full heart.

"What for?" he replied in a kind tone, rejecting both my thanks and hand. "We have only entered into a business engagement, and no thanks are due for that."

I jumped down from the desk and put my arms round

Ilse's neck. Her face looked black as midnight and veritably frightened me.

"Ilse," I entreated, "don't be angry. That just had to be, and now I can sleep peacefully once more."

"Oh, yes, Ilse is set aside now and has nothing more to say," she replied, not pushing me away, however. "So, that had to be. Well, I wash my hands of it as far as I am concerned. In the haide you couldn't count three in the face of a stranger; but now, when you have an opportunity of taking your own way and find that others are on your side, you are able to chatter like a magpie and have cheeks like a roasted apple. If the story ends badly for you think of me, but don't come to me for pity!"

She undid my arms from her neck, took my right hand in hers, and was about to leave the room, when Herr Claudius, who had meantime reseated himself at his writing-table and was scratching away rapidly, called out:

"Stop! Are you going to give over Fräulein von Sassen's fortune absolutely to my care without receiving any acknowledgment?"

Now it was Ilse's turn to grow red as a roasted apple. She was ashamed of having been so negligent—she who prided herself on always keeping her head.

"Your good countenance is to blame for it, sir," she apologized. "With any one else I should never have forgotten to demand a receipt."

So saying, she pocketed the certificate, while I seized the bank-notes lying on the table. The strict business man must have formed a nice opinion of the party from the haide!

"What intolerable pedantry!" exclaimed Charlotte in the hall. "As if all the world didn't know that the Firma Claudius would never condescend to dirty its fingers with a few thousand thalers like that! Everything must be signed and sealed to the last farthing!"

"There must be regularity," replied Fräulein Fliedner, "and perhaps you will one day make that discovery for yourself." And she wiped off a few specks of dust which had fallen on her silk mantilla in the wareroom.

The young lady tossed her head, and instead of replying darted down the steps leading to the yard, saying:

"Now we shall see Darling."

XIV.

THE yard was empty, but, on the other hand, both sides of the garden door stood wide open and a terrific noise proceeded from the garden, as if men and animals were running wild through it.

Herr Claudius, who had followed us, paused a moment in surprise, then hastened toward the garden.

My heart beat with anxiety and pity at the scene I witnessed through the open door. A skittish horse was tearing about the flower-garden. The slight fawn-like animal flew like a flash of light across the large variegated plot, and shaking its mane and neighing loudly, scornfully defied all the hands and feet that were pursuing it.

With positive delight he seemed to trample down a bed of stock gilliflower, then broke into the greenhouse, smashing all before it. For one moment the chestnut stood upright, dismayed by the clatter he himself had made, but for one moment only, then turning round he darted like an arrow into the midst of a standard which was literally one mass of purple-red roses and broke it down.

All the gardeners, the people busy in the house, even the two gentlemen in the office, who had doubtless heard the noise within, all rushed up and down in company with Dagobert and a bedizened jockey, and Charlotte now added to the number of pursuers, having remained hitherto standing near me.

Her tall, powerful form suddenly confronted the wild animal as though it had sprung out of the ground, and it started back snorting before the unexpected obstacle; but the two slight yet powerful hands had already seized it by the bridle and held it in an iron grasp until assistance came from all sides and seized the ill-conditioned beast.

"Charlotte, you are a brick," cried Dagobert, breathless, but proud and triumphant, as he kissed his sister on the forehead without more ado. The young man from the office was standing near her pale as a ghost, with downcast eyes. He was the first that had come to Charlotte's assistance. I saw her glance at his face, which became fiery red, and then turn from him with a gesture of indifference, her lips half-forming the words "Ah, bah!"

Every one was admiring her strength and temerity. As

for me, I longed to kiss those powerful hands. Herr Claudius alone never uttered a word.

"Who left the door open?" he inquired sternly as he strode into the midst of the group, who immediately dispersed respectfully.

"I was going to renew the flowers on Banker Tressel's tables and had two people with the large hand-barrow with me for that purpose," said the gardener with the soft voice who had spoken to us the previous day. "Both sides of the door have to be opened to admit the large hand-barrow, and it was probably the oleander on it which caused the animal to take fright."

Herr Claudius was silent. He never uttered a word of blame either to Dagobert, who had brought the horse into the yard, nor yet to the jockey for not taking better care of it. Nor did he say one syllable about the injury to the garden. He examined the foaming animal attentively. He was a beautiful creature, but there was something tricky in the way in which he let his head down and threw it back again suddenly.

Meantime Dagobert had thrown himself on the horse and steed and rider were suddenly flying about the yard again. It was a splendid sight. After a short and passionate struggle the animal yielded to its lord and master and became obedient to his slightest motion.

How small all the people round seemed, even the strikingly handsome young Helldorf himself, in comparison with that Tancred yonder—he of the chestnut locks. Nothing but a deeper glow upon the rider's cheek gave token of the hidden contest with the horse; the elastic form betrayed no unusual exertion of strength.

"Uncle," he called out suddenly, "forgive Darling his naughtiness in consideration of his fine qualities. Isn't he splendid? Just look at him! His elegant elastic build, his small head set on the delicate neck, graceful as a lady, yet with the strength and courage of a hero! Uncle, it would make me so happy to have him."

"I am sorry for that, Dagobert, for I do not intend to buy him. The count must ride him himself," said Herr Claudius regretfully but decidedly as he walked off to see after repairing the damage done.

Dagobert sprang off the horse with a bound and threw the reins to the jockey, who smiled maliciously.

"Give my compliments to the count," he said. "I will see him again."

The man rode off and the bystanders dispersed to their several occupations.

Charlotte took her brother's arm and looked tenderly into his heated face. She drew him into the garden, where Fräulein Fliedner and Ilse had already preceded them, going direct toward the ruined greenhouse. Every one had forgotten me. I followed the brother and sister, who took the road to the bridge.

"Now, was I not again in the position of a school-boy there?" broke out Dagobert, with his teeth shut—his voice sounded as if he was half-choked with rage and vexation. "Nothing disgusts me so much as this assumption of calmness. He won't buy the animal for two reasons: first, because by its bad behavior he has lost a few pence worth of bouquets, and, secondly, because in his cit arrogance he doesn't wish to have any dealings with the aristocratic seller. He would rather let some old Jew deceive him. But not a word of that, of course. He is totally silent, pretends not to observe the destruction, and revenges himself simply by drawing back without any ostensible reason—and then this sudden assumption of equestrian knowledge and management! He who has never been on the back of anything better than his one-legged office stool suddenly pretends to be a judge of the matter, measures the horse with the eye of a connoisseur, and——"

"Not so fast there, Dagobert," interrupted Charlotte. "I am by no means sure but that uncle led a wild enough life once, especially in Paris. Not from any youthful passions—he has none, work always excepted—but perhaps for fashion's sake. What do I know?"

She shrugged her shoulders and glanced back at the standard rose-tree which was just being set up again under Herr Claudius' direction.

"It is impossible for us to do anything in the face of that iron mask of coldness and calculation," she continued, pointing in that direction. "There is nothing for it but to hold one's tongue, keep one's hand pressed to the restless beating heart, and wait till some lucky star causes our rescue."

In turning round she had observed me and held out her

hand for me to walk beside her. Dagobert, on the contrary, drew back at my appearance. It was evidently unfortunate in his opinion to have had a spectator behind him. Had he but known what was going on within me just then! My fingers were clutching at the bank-notes, and I would have given anything to have flung them in the face of that man at the rose-bush as I had done his thalers in the haide—the icicle who, with an appearance of kindness and an assumption of goodness, tyrannized over those two fine young creatures and made them sensible of his power. Had they, then, no other relative in the world but this hard-hearted old uncle? I felt enthusiastically interested in them without their knowledge.

Dagobert took his leave of us at the bridge; he was going to town. How good and noble he must be. Notwithstanding all that inward vexation and annoyance, he went and took leave of his uncle as if nothing had happened.

Charlotte walked slowly by me, saying she wanted to fetch a book from the library.

“Come here, little one,” she said, laying her arm round my shoulders and drawing me so close to her that I could feel the violent beating of her heart. “I like you. You have character and a courageous heart in your Lilliputian form. It requires courage indeed to be able to look into Uncle Eric’s eyes and ask him for anything.”

“And have you no father?” I inquired; “not even a grandmother?” I said, pressing close to her and looking into her handsome eyes, which were still lighted up with the recent excitement. It occurred to me at that moment that even with my mentally diseased grandmother I ought to have been a happy child.

She looked down smiling at me.

“No, princess, no grandmother, either, to leave me 9,000 thalers. Oh, how I would shake the dust off my feet! No, we were early left orphans. My father fell at Isly, in Morocco, in the year ’44. He was a French officer. When he left France I was still in long clothes. I don’t even know what he was like.”

“Perhaps like Herr Claudius. Of course he was his brother?”

She stopped suddenly, drew away her arm, and clapped her hands together, laughing.

"Oh, child, you are too strange! A Clandius in the French service! A son of the respectable old thoroughly German seed warehouse! No, that would have disturbed their old and honorable succession. No, no, there's not one drop of this worthy German trading element in our composition. Dagobert and I are thoroughly French—French body and soul; and thank God we have not a drop of that cold blood in our veins, either. We are adopted children. Uncle Eric took us, for what reason no one knows—not from a tender, pitying heart, at all events. I dare say that sounds badly from my lips, but I can't believe it was from that motive."

She put her arm again round me and we proceeded further.

"This reception of us into his house would be noble and praiseworthy on his part, and I should certainly not be the last to thank him for it," she continued, "if he did not exhibit such intolerable despotism. He has given us his name, and whereas our real name is Méricourt, we are obliged to call ourselves Claudius—to sign ourselves Claudius. And what a horribly stiff burgher name it is! If he want in some degree to make up in the German ear for the name of Méricourt, there ought at least to be a 'von' before it. We certainly have no cause to be grateful for this unwilling change of name. He hangs the name of the shop round our necks, and it is a great impediment to Dagobert in his profession as a soldier."

"He is a soldier!" I exclaimed in astonishment. Fräulein Streit had often enough given us descriptions of the gay uniforms which had formerly frequented my father's house.

"Well, does that astonish you so much? Oh, so, you have not seen him in his regimentals, but I should have thought the officer was visible in him even in civilian costume. His regiment is stationed at K. and he is on leave here for several months. I am proud of Dagobert. We suit each other admirably and make up each other's deficiencies as brother and sister rarely do. We love each other perhaps all the more because we were so long separated. From the time I was three years old I lived at school until about two years ago, and Dagobert was first in a professor's family and afterward at the military college."

By this time we had reached the parterre in front of the Carolinenlust.

"Come, Hans, come here," cried Charlotte.

The crane, which had taken up its position near the pond once more, flew toward her like an ardent adorer. From every side flocked pea-fowl and guinea-hens, and now and then I caught sight of a pheasant's plumage, but it always drew back into the copse. My presence intimidated the shy birds.

"Just look at all this undeserved affection!" laughed Charlotte. "It is really quite disinterested, for I never feed or pet them, and yet they follow me everywhere the moment they hear the sound of my voice. Is it not singular?"

I did not think it at all singular. I was running already by her side, like a faithful if somewhat spoiled little dog. I was far too inexperienced to be able to distinguish between the power of her character and its individual qualities. At all events, it was the inconceivable decision and strength of her whole bearing and the sound of her firm, ringing voice which had such an effect upon me and so impressed me that I already received all she said or did as gospel. That there could be error or untruth mingled with it never once occurred to me.

"Where are the people that live in there traveling?" I inquired, pointing to the sealed doors as we passed through the *bel-étage* of the Carolinenlust.

Charlotte stared at me and looked as if she doubted I was in my right mind. Then laughing aloud she said:

"Do people seal their doors in your country when they leave home? Has Frau Ilse sealed up the Dierkhof in that fashion? Where are the people gone to? Ha! ha! ha! To heaven, little one."

I started violently.

"They are dead?"

"Not they, but he. A young unmarried man, named Lothar, inhabited the *bel-étage*. He was Uncle Eric's eldest and only brother—a splendid officer. You will become acquainted with his beautifully painted portrait, which hangs in the saloon in the front house."

"And he is dead."

"Dead, child; actually, irrevocably dead. He died of apoplexy according to the official obituary, but in reality

he secretly sent a bullet through his own head. The world connects his death with a certain princess of the ducal house."

"Is her name Princess Sidonie?" involuntarily escaped me.

"Oh, so the little savage from the haide possesses genealogical information! But you must say 'was,' for Princess Sidonie is also long since dead—a few days before the handsome young officer: that is a long past time, of which nobody knows much, but I least of all. All I can tell you is that the seals were placed there by the last order of its former occupant and are to remain there till—till the end of all things. I should like to peep in—a stolen glance, just for once. But everything is too well guarded and barricaded for that, and Uncle Eric keeps an Argus eye upon every seal."

Oh goodness! Suppose that that inexorable man with the piercing glance should ever discover that the little stranger had already been skipping about behind those seals! A shudder ran through me and I screwed up my lips. Oh that the unholy secret might never escape them! Scarcely had I entered the world before I found something to conceal; I whose thoughts and words had hitherto been as free and frank as the haide wind which blew my wild locks hither and thither.

Meantime Ilse had followed us up the stairs and kept scolding me because I had escaped from her while she was looking at the disasters in the greenhouse.

"That is a pretty mess that abominable animal has made," she said quite angrily. "Two of the large expensive panes are completely smashed, and a beautiful tree covered with magnificent red blossoms has been utterly ruined. Its leaves lie like snow upon the ground. And there stood that man, quiet as a mouse the whole time, never uttering a word! I wish it had happened to me!"

"Uncle Eric has flowers enough," said Charlotte giddily. "A few spoiled blossoms go for nothing. Besides, don't imagine that an individual one will be lost. They will be set on wire and put in the bouquets that have been ordered by hundreds for a burgher ball to-night. Nothing goes to waste here; you may rest assured of that."

She opened the library door, but I kept close to her and

entered at the same time, running over immediately to the window where my father sat. I did not mean her to see how ridiculous and helplessly he would look up from his writing. She must not laugh—I would not suffer it.

"Father, here we are again," I said, laying my arm round his neck so that he could not raise his head. He did not try, but only looked at me and smiled. I was too happy. He already knew my voice and I had gained some influence over him.

"So, little one, that is the way you surprise me," he said, jesting, and pinching my cheek. "But if you want to be exactly like your dear mamma, you must only just lay your hand very, very softly on my forehead or drop a flower on my writing-paper and disappear again before I have even time to think who it could have been."

It always gave me a sharp pain when he mentioned my mother, whom he must have loved above all things. For him she had had a thousand endearments, but she had hardly recognized the existence of her only child.

At this moment my father espied Charlotte. He sprang up and bowed.

"I have brought you back your little daughter," she said; "but, doctor," she continued, "you really must allow us ignoramuses in the front house to do something toward forming and cultivating this little wild sapling from the haide."

He thanked her cordially for the offer and gave her unlimited power. Just then an idea seemed to occur to him and he began rubbing his forehead.

"Yes. By the bye—I had almost forgotten—but yesterday I was speaking for a few minutes to the Princess Margarethe and I happened to mention your arrival. She immediately expressed a wish to see you next week. She knew your mamma while she was maid of honor at L."

"Oh, you happy creature!" exclaimed Charlotte. "An ancient name, a celebrated father, and a mother who was a maid of honor—truly, the gods have emptied their horn upon your head. And very probably you don't know that you are to be envied."

"No, I am afraid of the princess," I answered shyly, pressing close to Ilse nervously.

"Don't be afraid, Lorchén. You will soon love her," said my father soothingly; but Charlotte knit her handsome dark brows.

"Don't be childish, haide flower," she said reprovingly. "The princess is very amiable. She is sister to the Princess Sidonie, of whom we were just speaking, and the young duke's aunt. She does the honors at court because he is not married yet, and is remarkable for her kindness toward little shy and—don't take it ill—somewhat awkward young girls on their first presentation at court. So be quite happy, little one."

She turned me round and round by the shoulders.

"Do you intend your daughter to be presented to the princess in this guise?" she asked my father, showing her pearly teeth with a bewitching smile.

He looked at her vacantly.

"I mean," she added, "in this antediluvian costume."

"See here, fräulein," interposed Ilse sharply. "My poor lady mourned in that very dress for my master. At that time she was still a person of distinction, and that dress was good enough for her, so I think it won't harm the princess to receive the little one in it."

Charlotte laughed in her face and inquired:

"How many years ago is that, Frau Ilse?"

At this a light seemed to break upon my father, and passing his hand over his forehead he said:

"Hem! That must be looked to. Yes, yes, you are right, Fräulein Claudius, Lorchén is not presentable so. Now I think of it, my late wife had exquisite taste and accompanied me to court frequently. Good Ilse, downstairs you will find several trunks full of appropriate toilets among my effects. The housekeeper in those days packed everything up after that painful event."

"Mercy on me, that is fourteen years ago!" exclaimed Ilse. "And they have never once been taken out and aired?"

He shook his head.

"Oh, you poor unfortunate," said Charlotte, throwing her arm round me. "I must prevent this, or the residenz will behold such a guy as never was seen. I will arrange it all, doctor."

"So—and who is to pay for it, pray?" inquired Ilse.

My father looked puzzled and discomposed and twisted his fingers in and out. Charlotte observed that at once and said:

"I will speak to my uncle about it."

"He can only give her what money belongs to her," broke in Ilse, "and if we have the spending of that, her bit of fortune will soon be given to the four winds with buying flounces and furbelows."

"As far as I am concerned you may keep your money in your pocket," said Charlotte angrily. "I will give her my own newest dress which the dressmaker only brought home yesterday—but in that attire she doesn't go to court. I like her far too well to allow that."

I turned round and secretly kissed the soft white hand that lay over my shoulder. Ilse saw this action. She shook her head, and an expression of pain and sorrow such as I had never before seen stole over her face. I think, for the second time that day, she bitterly repented having introduced me into "the sensible people's" house.

But as yet she had no real cause for anxiety; as yet no trace of vanity mingled with the feeling of gratitude which prompted me to kiss Charlotte's hand. Not the most distant idea entered my head of how much prettier I should look without the thick muslin tie, from which Charlotte boldly relieved me. My brown face, indeed, would no look one whit the whiter for being placed in close comparison with the elegant lace collar the young lady wore, and my small ears, which always became fiery red at the least excitement, would look just as ridiculous as they did showing above the muslin collar. All this never occurred to me at that moment. I was grateful wholly and solely for the love shown me.

Charlotte took leave of my father without finding the book she wanted; my presentation at court appeared to have raised a very whirlpool of thoughts in the white forehead. She assured me once again down in the hall that she would be responsible for everything, and admonished me gravely to overcome my causeless nervousness and timidity. She then hastened back to the front house.

"You won't wear borrowed things, of course," said Ilse to me as Charlotte disappeared in the bosquet opposite. "Your blessed grandmother would turn in her grave. And now I must actually go and ask Herr Claudius for the money for this finery myself. They will make a nice dressed doll of you in that house over there."

As we were entering the sitting-room the kind old gardener came toward me and said that he had arranged a flower-table in my room by Herr Claudius' desire.

With great difficulty I brought myself to express a few stiff words of thanks. I didn't want Herr Claudius' flowers; he might sell them instead, the narrow-hearted calculating uncle! I wouldn't even go in to see them. But in the afternoon, in one of the hottest and most oppressive hours of my life, I sat near them, for they partially overshadowed my writing-table. My writing-table! What irony lay in the idea of giving me a table to be dedicated expressly to the use of the pen. And now I was seated at it, overcome with the difficulties and anxiety—for I wanted to and literally had to write a letter—the first in my life. It had been inexorable. "Just see how you will accomplish the business you have made for yourself. Not one finger will I move in the matter," she had said in a tone admitting of no appeal; and thus had she left me to perform my herculean task alone.

"DEAR AUNT: I have read your letter. It pains me to the heart to hear that you have lost your beautiful voice, and as my dear grandmother is dead, I send you the money."

Thus ran the confused black characters on the sheet of white paper that lay before me. The commencement was easy, and I shut my eyes to assist me in further composition. A delicious perfume stole toward me. Yes, there stood the flower-stand; pale yellow tea-roses hung drooping over, and—oh, joy of joys—beneath this wealth of roses, azalias, and camellia-trees lay a wreath of blooming heather! That was really too much on the part of the old gardener. I flung away the pen and grasped the flower buds with both hands. Then rose in memory the well-beloved scene; the roof surrounded by the hum of bees, the haide verdure peering from its every tile, and on the tops of the old oaks the magpies shrieking in the quiet orchard! The burning noonday sun was once more bearing down on the old fir tree, and the blossoms of the yellow broom twinkled through the red and violet colored haide just like golden stars. Once more I was chasing the beauteous blue butterflies up to the very birch trees and into the thickets of willow and alder, and I actually seemed to feel the flow of the delightful, cool, dark haide stream over my bare feet! Suddenly it all vanished, even as it

came; and I grasped the odious pen once more and dipped it in the vile black stuff which had been discovered to be my torment. And now to proceed:

“I live with my father at Herr Claudius’ in K., and perhaps you will write me a few lines to say if you receive the money safely.”

So, that was all quite right; the only thing was, would she be able to read it? Ilse always said nobody could make head or tail of my writing, “because the letters were all placed wrong.” Just at that moment the crane began dancing, a flock of guinea-fowl fled timidly behind the masonry round the pond, and Dagobert stepped forward from the wood. He was walking rapidly toward the Carolinenlust, swinging his walking-stick in the air. I made a dive downward, for he gave a passing glance at the window where I was; but he was not coming in—no, that would have been too foolish if my first hasty, nervous anticipation had been realized and the door really opened. He passed on upstairs to the library, and I listened to his footsteps till the last echo died away. Oh, how much there was in the world to be seen and known, and yet there were people like Herr Claudius who spent their days in scribbling and poring over great account-books as he did over his folios in the front house.

And now my signature was yet to be added:

“Your niece, LENORE VON SASSEN.”

And finally the address, which I copied out with much labor, letter for letter, from the torn fragment of my aunt’s note. Heaven be praised! it was finished, and if it was the first, assuredly it should also be the last letter I would ever write. There lay the pen once more on the old French inkstand, and I granted it eternal rest with all my heart.

Ilse was compelled to put the five seals on the cover whether she would or not. She then carried it angrily to the post, scarcely touching it with the tips of her fingers, but yet determined to do it with her own hands, that such a packet of money might not be intrusted to strangers.

This poor little composition of mine and its results have

often reminded me of a little bird that sows, all unconsciously, the seed of some bad noisome weed in a bed of choice and lovely flowers.

XV.

THE Firma Claudius was one of old standing. It was in existence and had already attained high repute at the time the tulip mania raged throughout the world, beginning with Holland. That was in the first half of the seventeenth century, when for three roots of the "Semper Augustus" the nowadays inconceivable sum of 30,000 guildens used to be given. The immense fortune of the Claudius' dated chiefly from that time. They had selected this particular branch of the flower trade and given their whole attention to these precious specimens of tulips. Many stories were told of the most remarkable and valuable of this species being sent out of the famous German house of Claudius; of their having been purchased in Holland for fabulous prices; and, adopted by the Dutch, they were sent in to the market with the Dutch stamp on them. But the wealthier this mercantile house became the more upright, simple, and retired did its heads become also. They had retained the severest burgher simplicity and plainness, and a warning against all luxury and an exhortation to the maintenance of the same discipline and sobriety, on pain of disinheritance, ran through a long succession of last wills and testaments for the benefit of every succeeding successor.

That was the origin of the dark house of hewn stone in a retired street never having undergone any external beautifying. They were all obliged to live in it according as they succeeded one another, and the business premises, the vaulted stone chamber with the brown cloth carpet, looked to-day precisely as it had done when those costly roots were packed up in it which were to burst upon the delighted eyes of the tulip-worshipers as the despotic queen of flowers appearing in a new brilliantly hued attire!

The old gentlemen who cherished delicate flower-blossoms with one hand and forged iron chains for their suc-

cessors with the other ought to have known best that the change which produces variety is not subject to the leading-strings of law, and would have been far wiser had they allowed their experience with flowers to be exercised also for the benefit of human nature.

Eberhard Claudius, an intellectual and remarkable man, had suffered severely from the narrow restrictions and traditions of the house, but he knew how to lighten them. It is related of his beautiful and passionately loved wife that she grew quite depressed in the gloomy apartments of that front house, and all at once, unknown to the outer world, a French architect arrived one day with foreign artists and erected a lovely little castle in the surrounding wood, which was inclosed by a wall and was the property of the Firma Claudius. An immense number of very old and beautiful trees were cut down to afford space for the building, which was a model of beauty, light, and life, filled with little statuettes and mirrors which everywhere reflected the beauty of the idolized wife. And on the day when that pale flower first saw the little pond arise, almost like a fairy-tale, when, meeting that tender, thoughtful husband in her sunny bower, she threw her arms around his neck speechless with joy, he christened it "The Carolinenlust" in her honor.

Eberhard Claudius was also the founder of the cabinet of antiquities and the valuable library with the collection of manuscripts. He had traveled in Italy and France, and with the eye of a rare judge selected and sent home treasures of art and science, which, however, remained as closely concealed in the Carolinenlust as the beautiful lady.

His son and successor, Conrad, returned to the old track. He restored the old puritanical strictness once again, shut up the Carolinenlust as a breach against the spirit of their forefathers' directions, collected all the art treasures and put them under lock and key; and not until the time of his grandson, Lothar Claudius, did the "variety" break out again.

On the death of their parents—his younger brother Eric and he lost them early—he positively declined to enter the firm. His fiery temperament selected the military profession, in which he rose rapidly. He was made noble and an adjutant, and was the prime favorite of the

prince of that country. The Carolinenlust was opened once more. It suited admirably as a residence for this ambitious and aspiring branch of the old commercial house, and as if to protest against the most distant connection with the front part, a door, closely sealed, was suddenly erected on that side of the bridge.

This handsome young officer resided there in a veritable solitude, while the bookkeeper, Eckhof, took charge of the business until Eric Claudius had finished his education and, true to the old traditions of his house, entered on his inheritance with iron energy and endurance.

The deceased officer had just as little knowledge about the cabinet of antiquities as his predecessor, and the chests and boxes in the cellars had never been touched for years, when the young duke suddenly assumed the reins and discovered a real passion for archæology. My father, one of the first authorities, was called to K., and lovers of antiquities grew up like mushrooms all around. His royal highness might have plastered the walls of his residence with the treasures. Ball-rooms echoed with the conversation about Greek, Roman, and Etruscan antiquities; jaw-breaking words, such as numismatic, glyptic, and epigraphic, flowed from the coral lips of the dancers.

Dagobert carried the news of this fresh fancy at court into the silent walls of the commercial department. Fräulein Fliedner, who had lived with Lothar's and Eric's mother, and who, in accordance with directions left by her, continued to hold her situation as confidential housekeeper and general care-taker, knew of much that had passed away in the family and mentioned the buried antiquities. Dagobert told my father about them and described afterward the manner in which he had stood a moment hesitating before the house with the stern, respectable, and business-like aspect, but had at last ventured in to request permission from the owner to make a search throughout the souterrain for these hidden treasures. Herr Claudius had granted it, if but reluctantly.

The following day my father had disappeared downstairs and failed to make his appearance again the whole day. He neither ate nor drank, but was absolutely crazy with excitement—an amazing discovery of scientific value was suddenly opened to him. Herr Claudius gave orders for the unpacking and arrangement of the art treasures and

had rooms on the ground-floor prepared for my father, giving him at the same time the free and entire use of the library.

I did not, as a matter of course, become acquainted with all these circumstances during the first days of my arrival at K. Indeed, I was but little inclined to become acclimatized there, for after the first rush of new impressions had somewhat subsided the home-sickness after the haide returned with tenfold power. Ilse indeed was still there; she had allowed herself a few days longer that she might "set my father's young companion housekeeper well a-going" and see her a little better rooted in the new ground. But that did not satisfy my troubled heart. I knew she must go away and leave me in the end, and the thought of it brought me ever new and indescribable distress.

In the other house every one was only too kind to me, but I hated its darkness and gloom and never entered it except either with Charlotte or Fräulein Fliedner. Of my own inclination I could never bring myself to a visit. This drew me more and more to my father. Following his gentle advice I no longer disturbed him, as I had recently done, when I startled him by putting my arm round his neck, and I still never ventured to lay a flower on his paper, as my mother had done; but I had found courage to set a vase of wild-flowers on his writing-table every morning and to pass my hand gently over his partially gray hair as I stole past noiselessly. I liked being in the library, but still better in the saloon with "the broken trash," as Ilse persisted in calling it. These silent faces gradually obtained more and more power over me and even enabled me now and then for a moment to forget my distant haide, after which my soul yearned with feverish longing.

But I was often frightened away from that too. Dago-bert, who seemed to have a real passion for antiquities and who proudly styled himself my father's "familiar," spent whole days between the cabinet and the library. As soon as ever I heard his footstep I used to fly by the opposite door, run head over heels downstairs, and not content with putting that distance between us, often ran and ran till I found myself breathless in the wood.

This bit of wood was delightful in its wild luxuriance.

The old Herren Claudius had bought it and built a wall round it, not as being of any use in the business, but for the single and only purpose of having a spot withdrawn from public view where they could refresh themselves without fear of intrusion by a quiet walk on Sundays. This was the sole luxury they allowed themselves. My ardent longing after the boundless plains of the haide at first prevented my appreciating the beauty of the wood. I never even glanced upward. A green sky—how horrid! But my eye fell with double tenderness on the light blossoms which peeped out shyly here and there from mosses, leaves, and rockeries—they seemed to me as timid and as much retired from observation as myself.

Fearlessly as I had always ranged the haide, I had not courage to penetrate far into what seemed a wilderness here. I limited myself to the immediate neighborhood of the house, and my favorite retreat would certainly have become the bank of the little stream, because it reminded me of home; but the very day after my arrival at K. I was driven from it. When Ilse took the letter to the post I accompanied her as far as the bridge. The clear, colorless water was rippling as softly under the elegant little metal arch as the familiar haide stream behind the Dierkhof. I slipped into the copse; it was formed of willows and alders, with birch stems peeping out between. Pearl-shells, indeed, there were none, but there were smooth pebbles, and the banks were decked with water-lilies and ranunculuses. A blue wavering speck flashed on the crest of the purling water. It was the reflection of the summer sky—all, everything exactly like the little brook at home. I took off my shoes and stockings, and soon the blue water was dancing over my feet, which, to my annoyance, the few days of strict covering had considerably whitened. The chains seemed to fall from me, body and soul, and flow away on the waves. I laughed with pure delight and happiness and stamped and splashed about till the blue drops flew about like rain. There was a slight rustling in the bushes. Spitz had often come after me from the Dierkhof just that way and joined me in the water. He used to break through the bushes on those occasions, and I felt so completely at home just then that I fully expected to see my dear companion jump out. I called out his name quite loud. Alas! I was soon *désillusionnée*: no Spitz

appeared, as a matter of course, but the bushes moved at the spot where I had heard the noise, and an arm in a light coat sleeve hastily drew back.

I reached the bank with a bound. I could have cried with vexation. In the very first few days of my two years' probation I had gone back to my old tricks. Dago-bert had seen the wild sapling in her bare feet again, and there would be no end to the ridicule and mockery. Suddenly I remembered that his coat had been a dark one when I met him scarcely an hour before going to see my father, and then had I not noticed something glittering in the bushes, something I had already observed in the counting-house? It proceeded from a ring on Herr Claudius' hand. I breathed freely once more—yes, it was Herr Claudius. He had, no doubt, heard the senseless pattering in the water and had come down, anxious to see who was injuring a twig of his property and disturbing a stone in the river. He might be at ease, the strict master. I should never trespass again.

We had now been five days at K., and it was Sunday. At the Dierkhof we could only discern an occasional tinkle of the distant church-bells. How amazed I felt when suddenly a deep, solemn peal chimed on my ear!

Ilse prepared herself for church, and while she proceeded past the pond, looking very solemn, and accompanied by the ringing of the bells, I stood in the hall and watched her retreating figure. Just then the old bookkeeper came out of his room. He had his prayer-book under his arm and was drawing on a pair of pale lavender gloves—the old gentleman literally shone with cleanliness and neatness.

He stopped when he came near me. He did not bow, and his shining hat looked as if glued to his head; but for all that he measured me with a severe reproving glance. I trembled and felt dreadfully frightened, and as he opened his lips to speak I fairly turned and fled into the wood.

The dreadful creature! Suppose he were to follow me? I paused breathless and looked round timidly. The road I had taken led into the thicket. I had unconsciously run a good distance up hill. Below it was deadly still. No doubt the good man had taken the road to church. Before me lay a narrow path leading into a meadow. The dew still hung upon the feathery grass, and bordering the forest whole beds of bright red strawberries strewed

the ground. No one, probably, came to seek them there. They perfumed the air and the blossoms shimmered—I fancied I heard the music of the bells proceeding from them. Aged pine trees stood around, the rosin literally pouring from their huge trunks and a light murmur sounding in their summits.

“There was a spirit in the woods.” It was almost as silent as within the sealed chambers yonder, but there was a rustling in the forest. Something red and brown was moving about there, and suddenly the twisted antlers of a deer emerged majestically from among the boughs. The graceful animal was tame and gentle. The herd soon followed over the meadow and looked fearlessly at me with quiet eyes.

I went on further and further. How far my voyage of discovery extended I know not, but hours must have elapsed while I was running up and down the hill. I had not the least idea where I was, but I felt no fear—the pure, clear air had taken it all away. The hill was behind me now and I was in the valley once more, but where? The roads crossed each other, and I did not know which I was to take, when all at once I heard a man’s voice to my left, coming from the thicket. I recognized it at once. It was that of the kind old gardener, endeavoring in soft coaxing tones to calm a child who never ceased screaming. I followed the sound and soon stood before a wall. From that point the wood ceased; it was the boundary. I longed of all things to get a peep at the little screamer, but over that wall it was impossible; it was high and smooth as glass. But I knew how to climb trees like any wild cat. It had been nearly as favorite a habit as the foot-bath in the water-mirror, so in a very few minutes I was seated on the top of an elm.

I could overlook an immense tract and a great expanse of sky. On my right lay the city and its spires, surrounded by magnificent promenades; then came the river, the same that flowed through the Claudius estate. I was quite near the Carolinenlust without having known it, for the stream was only a few feet distant. On this side of the river, as far as the wood, lay charming villas surrounded by pretty gardens. On my left, so near that I could overlook everything in the upper story, stood a pretty little Swiss cottage. The spot of ground on which

it stood was circumscribed. In front was a small flower-garden and at the back a narrow strip of grass, overshadowed by a magnificent horse-chestnut and its thick shady boughs—that was the one and only tree in the little demesne, which was separated from the Claudius' wall only by a broad thoroughfare.

The old gardener, Schäfer, was walking up and down under the shadow of the balcony. He had thrown a pink calico cloak over his shoulders and was carrying the screaming little monster as cannily as the veriest old nurse could have done, and was singing every imaginable lullaby to it, in evident alarm. On the grass plot behind a little girl about four years was busily playing. She had on an old white frock and long flaxen curls fell down to her waist. The little creature was completely engrossed with her delightful game. She was tearing up the grass with both hands and loading a toy wagon with it. She never allowed the screaming to affect her for a considerable time, but at last she went into the garden, plucked a half-withered gilliflower, and offered it to her naughty little brother.

"You shouldn't pull the flowers, Gretchen; papa has forbidden it!" called out a man's voice from the balcony overhead.

The southern end of the balcony was covered so luxuriantly with the Virginian creeper (or wild vine) that not a ray of sunshine could penetrate the bower or disclose the table laid in the midst. Young Helldorf, who worked in Herr Claudius' office, stood in a stooping posture under the bower; until then I had not noticed him. He had a book in his hand, and though he uttered the warning in a reproving voice, a tender smile passed over his face as he looked at the charming little creature standing on her tiptoes.

Just then a gentleman crossed the bridge with a lady leaning on his arm. They paused a moment, listening; then the lady slipped away from her companion and ran on in advance toward the impatient child. She had evidently been at church, for she hastily laid a prayer-book on the nearest spot and held out her arms to the boy, who stopped crying at the first sound of her voice and rushed toward her, clapping his hands vehemently. She began at once to cover him with tender motherly kisses.

Then she threw her other arm round the little girl and drew her toward her. The little lady looked very delicate, and one could have fancied that the fat little fellow's weight would have broken her arm. She took off her straw bonnet, with the blue strings of which the child had been playing, and disclosed an exquisitely delicate lily-white face beneath a cloud of very fair hair, such as Gretchen's.

Meantime her husband had followed her into the garden. He was very like young Helldorf; the two handsome men were evidently brothers. He took his little daughter in his arms and threw her up in the air; the white frock looked like a summer cloud; the golden locks waved and fluttered in the summer breeze; and the child shrieked out with delight up toward the balcony, "Uncle Max, Uncle Max, do you see me?"

I was fascinated. It was the first time I had ever seen domestic happiness. Delight at the lovely picture, mingled with a vague yearning for something, I knew not what, filled my soul with sadness. No mother had ever pressed me thus passionately to her heart. I had never, like yonder baby boy, experienced the feeling that one sound of the maternal voice sufficed to quell every sorrow. But I had noticed too, with secret joy, how the young mother loved her children. Ah, how she was to be envied! What a joy must that be to have those little arms laid round her neck, seeking healing and consolation for every little woe from her hands.

Gretchen then resumed her game and the others went into the house. I slipped down quietly from the elm, and creeping along the wall, came to a gate which led into an opening. There was a key in the lock; it was covered indeed with rust and was evidently out of use. But my wish to speak to the little girl gave me strength and energy. After strenuous efforts the key at last turned in my hands and the gate opened with a creak.

XVI.

I RAN across the highway and stepped up to the wicket. Gretchen looked at me with amazement, and leaving her little carriage ran rapidly toward me.

"Did you open that?" she inquired, pointing to the open gate behind me. "May you do that, little lady?"

I laughed assent.

"But your garden is not pretty," she said, tossing her little head scornfully and pointing to the dark green on which the gate opened. "You haven't got one single flower in it. Look at ours. Schäfer has ever so many—thousands upon thousands of flowers!"

"Yes, but you mayn't pull any."

"No, I mayn't pull any," she said, quite crestfallen and putting her tiny finger in her mouth.

"But I know plenty of blue harebells and white flowers that you may pull, and strawberries, too—your little cart full!"

She immediately advanced toward me, pulling her cart behind her, and laid her hand trustingly in mine; it felt like a little bird, so soft and warm, between my fingers.

I was so happy in my new acquaintance that it never occurred to me that I had left the gate open behind me while we wandered on into the copse. There lay strawberries and harebells as profusely scattered as though the trees were dropping with them. The little one clapped her hands and began picking and plucking as if she intended to carry home half Herr Claudius' wood.

"Oh, what a lot of strawberries!" she whispered softly to herself, while she kept working away till the drops actually stood on her forehead from her exertions. She kept humming a little song all the time as an accompaniment.

"I can sing too, Gretchen," I said.

"As pretty songs as mine? I don't believe that. Uncle Max taught them to me. But let me hear one."

My ear for music must have been developed very early, for all the songs I knew were those Fräulein Streit had taught me in the back room. The little songs for children by Taubert were my special favorites, and I now began singing "The peasant had a pigeon-house." I had seated myself on a stone bench, and at the first sound Gretchen had left her cart, and with her arms resting on my knees gazed breathlessly into my face.

It was something uncommon—I was startled indeed at my own voice. In the haide it had always sounded but faintly; the wind had carried it away in every direction;

but here, on the contrary, it was caught and confined by the thick inclosure of trees on every side, and it rose so full and bell-like that I could scarcely believe it was myself.

The song of the peasant and his pigeons is a merry one. Gretchen laughed heartily at it and clapped her hands with delight at the end of the second verse.

"Did he find the pigeons again? Isn't there more of it?" she inquired.

I began again, but the tones suddenly died on my lips. From my position on the stone bench I was able to command a good view into the wood where it led to the Carolinenlust, and when the wind blew the leaves somewhat aside I could see the shimmer of the window-panes. By this path the old bookkeeper was coming toward us, and at sight of his silvery head and lowering countenance I could not help thinking of the hail-storms that used to pass over the haide. With some such similitude did that powerful form strike me as it rapidly advanced toward me.

Gretchen followed the direction of my eyes. She grew scarlet and with a cry of joy bounded toward the old gentleman and clasped him round the knees.

"Grandpapa," she called out tenderly, throwing her little head back.

He stood as if turned to stone and looked down at the child. Both his arms were extended like one whose progress is suddenly arrested by an awful and unexpected gulf, and in this position he remained motionless. He seemed to fear that if he let his hands fall they might perchance touch one of the light golden hairs.

"You are my grandpapa, are you not? Louisa said you were."

"Who is Louisa?" he asked in a cold, hard voice, which sounded to me as though he wished by this question to ward off all further discussion.

"Why, grandpapa, our Louisa! She nursed my little brother. But she has left us now. We cannot have a nursery-maid; mamma says it is much too dear."

A slight motion passed over the stony face just then and the hands sank a little.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Ah, don't you know, grandpapa? Why, Schäfer's

little Caro knows it, and our little kitten too. I am called Gretchen. But I have more names than that—beautiful names. I will tell them to you. Anna Marie Helene Margarethe Helldorf.”

She told off this solemn recapitulation on her tiny fingers. There was an indescribable charm in the voice and whole appearance of the innocent little creature, against which even the old man was not proof, and all at once I saw the jeweled hand laid on the child's head. He bent down—was he really going to kiss the fair young face? Perhaps if he had been given time to take the little creature in his arms and heart to heart have felt the same blood pulsing there—perhaps that might have been a moment on which angels from above might have smiled. But the good and forgiving emotions which arise are too often marred by an evil destiny which, with secret malice, instils poison into the soul and separates those finer threads by which we should become truly known to each other.

I know not why I was so terrified when I saw a woman's dress fluttering through the trees and coming in the direction of that unlucky gate. It advanced in great haste, and in a few minutes the young lady from the Swiss cottage stood a few paces from the group. She uttered a scream and hid her face in her hands. The old gentleman looked up startled, and never shall I forget the expression of icy scorn which filled the deeply affected, handsome face.

“Ah, the play has indeed succeeded admirably! People understand how to turn their children to account and teach them well!”

He pushed the child away so violently that it fell.

The lady went and took it in her arms.

“Father,” she said, raising her forefinger warningly, “to me you have done as you pleased; me you may trample under foot—I bear it willingly; but you may not touch my child with the tip of your harsh finger. Don't dare to do it again.”

She raised the little one, from whose now pale lips no further sound issued.

“I don't know who brought the child here,” she continued.

“I did,” I said, stepping forward trembling. “Forgive me.”

With all her excitement she did not fail to turn a gentle glance on me, though only for a moment, as she continued addressing the old man; and it seemed to me as if this tender form had become suddenly like very steel.

"I came to fetch the child home; she was absent and the forbidden gate stood open. With nameless terror I flew to avert the moment in which your eye might fall upon my child—I came too late. After a desperate struggle, my father, I have yielded and allowed myself to be called a heartless, thankless, lost child by you. I am powerless against your charges, to which the world says 'Yes' and 'Amen.' But as a mother you shall not attack me. I train up my jewel, my precious treasure"—and she pressed the child with passionate ardor to her breast—"this sweet, holy infant to act a part in pursuit of a selfish object! That is an insult I will not endure, which I repel, and for which you shall one day answer to me before God."

She turned away and disappeared. I thought he could not choose but follow the deeply offended lady and clasp her forgivingly in his arms, but he was evidently one of those narrow-minded men who look on it as impossible for them to make a mistake, and who, if such a suspicion ever crosses their minds, are only incited the more to sullenness and severity.

He cast a bitter glance after the departing lady, and stepped up to me so closely and so suddenly and with such a furious aspect that I retreated into the bushes.

"You," he said, addressing me, "how could you dare to open a fast-closed door when you had no right to do so in a strange place like this?"

There was a tone of fury in his voice, which betrayed that it had been nourished a long time in secret.

There I stood like one paralyzed; I could move neither hand nor foot. And oh, what was to become of me! Another came to the help of this dreadful man. Suddenly, as if he had sprung out of the ground, I saw Herr Claudius standing beside me; he must have come out of the thicket. I looked up at him. He had on the blue spectacles and looked still paler than when I had seen him at the office. He would, I felt sure, never forgive my having opened his garden door in that manner and admitted strangers. These two hard-hearted men were both about to pass sentence on me, and I could not escape; I stood defense-

less opposite them. Might I not make one effort to call my father or Ilse to my assistance?

"Herr Claudius," began the bookkeeper, strange to say much struck by the sudden appearance of the proprietor, "you see me in a state of great excitement. I came here for my usual Sunday walk, when——"

"I have witnessed the whole occurrence," broke in Herr Claudius, "from behind the copse."

"So much the better, because you will acknowledge then that I had good cause for my annoyance. First of all, a distant back gate, which we cannot well guard, has been opened without our knowledge."

"That is no doubt a thing not to be permitted, Herr Eckhof, but in your zeal you have forgotten that Fräulein von Sassen is the daughter of my guest and must not be spoken to in the manner and way you just now allowed yourself."

I looked up in astonishment and sought the eyes with the spectacles—things were taking quite a different turn from what I expected. The bookkeeper, on the one hand, stepped back, looking as much confounded as though such an answer was the first of that sort he had ever heard from those lips.

"Fräulein von Sassen," he repeated spitefully. "In what am I to respect nobility? Surely not in that ridiculously dressed-out child?"

"It did not occur to me that I had emphasized the noble name," answered Herr Claudius, coloring slightly. "I merely referred to the respect which is due from you to every guest in my house without exception."

"Well, well, you will live to see what kind of blessing such friendship as this will bring on your honorable house. I have begged and prayed enough—all to no purpose! The heathen gods have been dragged to light once more; and yonder in the Carolinenlust sits one who knows no God, but erects the false idols once more. And he who now holds the scepter, the godless youth upon the throne who should set his people an example of honesty and sobriety and make them temples of praise and prayer—he is helping to set up the new calf!"

Herr Claudius listened in silence, but in evident perplexity allowing the fanatical zealot his own way. The old man spoke visibly from full conviction, but more than

probably he had never given his master such an insight into his opinions as on this occasion, when he was carried away by excitement.

"That house yonder," he said, raising his arm and pointing toward the Carolinenlust, "that house was built in iniquity and has remained as a nest for vice; and those who failed in obedience to the old masters cannot expect peace. They wander hither and thither prophesying and lamenting over the misfortunes of the house which——"

Herr Claudius raised his hand to stop him.

"Have I not heard it, the shriek in the saloons on which the seals are fastened?" continued the old man in a still louder voice. "Have I not seen the lamp which hangs from the ceiling of my room tremble beneath the footsteps of the ghostly, unquiet spirits which wander above? I know it—they have risen from their graves: they are condemned to return to the world and warn the blind. Herr Claudius, the day on which that young person"—pointing toward me—"entered the Carolinenlust the sealed and built-up chambers overhead became inhabited."

Was it then possible? This man had been watching me! While I had been rummaging unjustifiably about the sternly guarded chambers of the dead, those sharp blue eyes had been fixed on the lamp below and observed each of my steps as it swung beneath them. This old man had heard the cry I uttered on seeing my own reflection, and now made use of it in his gloomy rage to prejudice the owner of the house against my father and me.

Involuntarily I glanced at Herr Claudius. His face was turned toward me, but the blue glasses hid his eyes so effectually that it was impossible to discover what impression the old bookkeeper's remarks made on him. He had come one step nearer to me. Perhaps terror had made me color, and he feared an exhibition of nerves on my part. When, however, he was satisfied that my feet were not going from under me he turned once more toward my grim persecutor.

"You maintain," said he, "that orthodoxy must finally lead us back to the wildest superstition." There was a mixture of irritation and regret in his ordinarily calm voice. "I cannot say how sorry I feel to see you falling into this dreadful mysticism, Herr Eckhof. My attention has already been directed to it, but I would not believe it.

The right to dictate your views is, as a matter of course, nothing of mine. I have only to beg you not to bring them forward either in my house of business or any other part of my establishment."

"I shall not fail, Herr Claudius," replied the book-keeper, in whose peculiarly subservient tone lay a world of hidden malice. "But you will allow me to make a request also on this spot. I have inhabited the Carolinen-lust now for many long years, and I have considered it one of its greatest advantages that I could spend my Sunday here, in accordance with the strict directions of your predecessors, in quietness and undisturbed meditation. I therefore beg you will give the strictest orders that the Sunday calm may not be disturbed by such unseemly yelling. I think thus much consideration may be accorded to me—an old man."

The blue spectacles turned toward me again, and I expected a stern exhortation to obeying rules in future, etc., but nothing of the kind came.

"I heard no yelling," said Herr Claudius very quietly. "But I had to witness a scene which hurt me much. This little girl"—he bent his head in my direction—"with her innocent childish song did nothing to transgress God's commandment, but you, Herr Eckhof, came straight from church. You are, as you have proved to me to-day, one of those infallible Christians who know how to support every action of theirs with the law of God. How, then, did you find it possible to pollute this holy day with the severity and implacability you showed your children yonder?"

An evil glance shot from under the dark brows at the speaker.

"I have no children, Herr Claudius, and that *you* ought to know better than any one else."

He emphasized the "you" as though it were intended to inflict a wound.

He bowed and retraced the path he had come with rapid strides. I felt distinctly that it was the intention to hurt and silence Herr Claudius by the so characteristically marked syllable, and I looked at him—the dagger had struck home!

XVII.

YES, the bookkeeper must have succeeded in wounding Herr Claudius deeply. After a slight shudder his tall form stood erect in evident amazement, while he watched the retreating form till it vanished among the trees.

I wanted to seize this opportunity for escaping, but at the faint noise occasioned by my moving Herr Claudius turned round.

"Wait," said he, putting out his arm to prevent my moving. "The old man was greatly excited, and I should not like you to meet him again just now."

He spoke just as kindly and calmly as ever. Should I seize this opportunity of being alone with him to confess the cause of the ghostly sounds in the *bel-étage* at the Carolinenlust? No, I had no confidence in him and felt myself in his presence turned to ice. Just as my whole soul had felt drawn to Charlotte without reserve, so on the contrary did it recoil from this man of cold calculation, whose peculiar self-restrained mode of action and being neither allowed to himself nor others any extravagance. He had a moment ago been speaking of Christian love, and from any other lips I should have reëchoed the words with all my heart; but from his lips they sounded only like the result of a clear, passionless understanding. He had taken me under his care, but I was not altogether so childish or void of judgment as not to know that that was done to restrain the insolence of those under him. I was a far too enthusiastic pupil of Charlotte's not to agree in her opinion with regard to this man's every act.

I obeyed him, however, and waited patiently till the heavy footsteps were no longer audible. Mechanically I kept making a pile of the gravel with the point of my foot. The clumsy shoe was thus brought full to light—what did I care? It was only Herr Claudius that was standing beside me and looking at it.

"I will go and shut the gate," I said, breaking the momentary silence as it suddenly occurred to me that it was standing wide open. I wanted to beg Herr Claudius' pardon, but the words would not come out.

"Come, then," said he. "I cannot understand how your tiny hands were able to open a lock now rusted for years."

"The child," I replied—and at the remembrance of the little darling I could not forbear a smile. "I was determined to see it nearer, and the people that all looked so happy together. I have never known what it is to see parents fond of their children."

"And how was it possible for you to see into this family?"

I pointed quite coolly to the top of the elm which we were just passing under.

"I sat up there."

He smiled secretly, and in spite of the spectacles I saw him glance at my left side. Involuntarily my eye followed his, and oh, misery! what should I see but an enormous three-cornered tear in my unfortunate black frock, and really done as though I had taken the measure to it.

I felt my cheeks glow, and though it was only Herr Claudius, for all that I felt ashamed.

"Oh—Ilse!" was all I could say.

"Don't be frightened. We won't allow Frau Ilse to scold you," he said kindly, but in just such a tone of protection as he might have used to little Gretchen. That annoyed me. I did not consider myself so small and utterly helpless as all that, and at that moment I remembered how different Dagobert was. He treated me, especially since he heard I was going to court, exactly like a grown-up lady. "Frau Ilse was provided for accidents, too," continued Herr Claudius. "She asked me yesterday for money to provide a court dress for you, but I will take this opportunity to call your attention to one point. So long as Frau Ilse remains here she can hold these matters in her hands, but on her departure I must beg you will always apply to me direct yourself."

"Must that be so?" I inquired, without attempting to conceal my displeasure.

"Yes, Fräulein von Sassen—it must be so, for regularity's sake."

"Well, my dear grandmother was quite right in detesting money—such a piece of work about a few thalers passing from one hand to another."

He smiled at me and said kindly:

"I will make it as easy to you as I can."

"But must I go into your dark room for every penny I require?"

"Of course. Do you find the room so horrible?"

"The whole front house is so cold and gloomy. I don't know how Charlotte and Fräulein Fliedner stand it. I should die of nervousness and oppression." Involuntarily I pressed both hands on my breast.

"The wicked old house. It has endangered a woman's life before now," he said, smiling faintly. "And no doubt it is in fault now, that you are so dissatisfied with us."

"Oh, I am delighted with the flower-garden," I replied quickly without directly answering his remark. "It seems to me like a whole bookful of marvels and fairy-tales. Many a time I have to shut my eyes and hold my feet and hands tight, or I should be tempted to throw myself head-long into so beautiful a bed of flowers."

"Do it if you like," he said, with his kind, quiet air.

I looked at him in amazement.

"And nicely you would scold!" burst from me. "How many a penny bouquet would be lost to you thereby; and oh, how many packets of seed!"

He turned away, locked the gate, and took the key out of the lock.

"This information about 'penny bouquets' you have acquired doubtless from the same source as you did that of the back room?" he said as soon as he had put the key in his pocket.

I was silent—I could not utter Dagobert's name. It was from him I had derived the "information," as Herr Claudius with a slight trace of bitterness called it. He did not ask further.

"But does neither the Carolinenlust nor yet the wood please you?" he inquired.

"It is very pretty here——"

"But not half so pretty as in the haide—eh?"

"I don't know—but I long after the haide. I suffer terribly, and sometimes so much that I should like to dash my head against these endless trees."

This complaint came almost involuntarily from me. No one in the house had asked me that question, but assumed on the contrary that the change must be quite delightful to me.

"Poor child!" he said—but that could not be sympathy; it was only that nature had given him a very soft voice.

We were just passing the parterre which lay in front of the Carolinenlust. Old Erdmann, who had recently forbidden our entrance into the house, was standing there. He held a sieve in one hand and with the other was scattering food for the fowl. Just as he was about to throw down a handful of corn Herr Claudius stepped up to him and said:

"You feed the poultry much too lavishly, Erdmann. Go into the copse yonder and see how the corn is growing up in such quantities that the animals are unable to keep it under. I have observed it with great displeasure." He put his hand into the sieve and let the corn slip through his thin fingers. "That is pure wheat, Erdmann. I must scold you. You know very well that such needless waste is an offense to me. Here corn is going to loss, while many a poor child is longing vainly for a crust of bread."

I was thoroughly exasperated. How well this man knew how to beautify his avarice! He didn't scold because a few pence were lost to him in the extravagant use of a few grains of wheat—oh, dear, no; the bread which might possibly have been baked out of the lost corn for some hungry child—that was what he complained of!

Old Erdmann excused himself by saying that there was not another grain of barley in the house, and made a hasty retreat into the thicket like a beaten hound. Oh, those abominable blue glasses, how they followed him! I turned my head away and began picking and plucking needlessly at the leaves, scattering them on the gravel.

"What has the poor chocolate bush done to you?" inquired Herr Claudius' voice close to me as softly and as calmly as though it were not he who had just been scolding. "Just suppose for one moment that some trace of homesickness, such as you suffer from, were to dwell in those petulantly destroyed blossoms."

I stooped down, hastily gathered up the scattered leaves, laid them on the cool sod, and covering them with a thick green bough, I said: "Now, at all events, they will die in their home;" and looked whether I would or not into the blue glasses.

"Will you be able to endure staying here?" he inquired.

"I must bear it. I am to be educated and it will take two years for that." Involuntarily I folded my hands

and sighed. "Two long years. But it cannot be helped, and I know now myself that I must learn. I was too ignorant in the haide. Little Gretchen over there knows more than I do."

He laughed gently.

"Yes, this time of learning and enduring is no doubt absolutely necessary for you, I think, when I recall the difficulty you found in writing your own name. In two years you can learn a great deal, but it may be your father and others also may wish you not to learn a great deal which the world, and especially court life, is too apt to instil into the young mind. Frau Ilse begged me yesterday to watch over you."

A sudden terror shook me. I would not bear that. I would struggle against it with all my might. Not willingly, at all events, would I place myself under the yoke that Dagobert and Charlotte were groaning under. But it was singular that I could not summon courage to tell him this to his face.

"I don't know what has come over Ilse," I said timidly, "but Fräulein Fliedner and Charlotte have undertaken that long ago; and I am so fond of Charlotte I shall certainly obey her."

"That must be avoided," he answered gravely. "In Fräulein Fliedner's hands you are safe; Charlotte, on the contrary, has far too much to do with herself to undertake your education. If I were to give her unlimited influence over an inexperienced nature she ought herself to be a model in every respect—she is far removed from that. Charlotte's nature is a noble one at the bottom, but there is some dross in it. I know that I shall often need to step between you both in warning and forbidding."

If I had ever had one spark of sympathy for this man, his last remorseless verdict drove it out of me. He was evidently revenging himself now bitterly for Charlotte's silly chattering about the back room. I knew it—and there was the low, mean way of revenging himself which irritated Dagobert. And now was to be fulfilled what even in the haide I had so much dreaded, and Ilse was alone to blame. The man who was himself glued from morning till night to his account-books; who held his watch with such an impertinent air to his unfortunate people if they failed in appearing punctually to the very

moment in his dark, dreary cell; who on every occasion possible counted each grain thrown to the poultry—to this stiff, rusty old miser was Ilse without a scruple consigning me! He would stick me between four walls, have me taught, and those abominable blue spectacles would be prying into everything I did. He already spoke of forbidding, and laid special stress on my bad writing, which must be improved. If he had purposely sought for some way of setting my whole being up in arms against him he could not have chosen a better than this detested one of copy-writing which he selected as the first to prescribe. He awakened something of the cat's sly malice in me.

"You will make me write a great deal, won't you?" I said, assuming a quiet and apparently submissive air.

"And you don't feel inclined for that," he said.

Instead of answering me—how detestable!—he read my thoughts in my face.

"No, not the very least inclination," I acquiesced angrily.

"Put me in the library upstairs and let me read, and even though I might not inhale a breath of fresh air or see a green leaf for months, still I will endure it; but write! No, it is dreadful to be gazing incessantly at that white paper and copying one straight and one crooked stroke after another, while the whole thing keeps whirling and dancing in your head and before your eyes, and one's feet won't keep quiet under the table. Then my head gets hot and my temples begin to throb; then I must jump up and run, run as far as my feet will carry me."

He smiled down upon me.

"I can easily imagine that your whole being rises against pure mechanical labor," he said. "You don't yet understand that the pen becomes an animated and fleet subject in our hands, that it can give form to all that 'dances and whirls in your head'—how could you? But ask your father. He has done science incalculable service with the pen in his hand; he would not wish to live deprived of it."

"Well, then, I will tell you, that is just one of the reasons I can't bear it," I grumbled out. "Is there anything more beautiful than that blue sky above, the delicious air around, and the whole solemn Sabbath morning? And there sits my poor dear father up there, behind those great heavy window-curtains, among the musty books that smell of leather and moldy paper and that are just one

mass of dust; and there he writes until his fingers can no longer hold the pen; and he has forgotten long ago, engrossed in that way, how beautiful the world is. And then when I go in he looks up startled and has to think awhile before he remembers I am his child. My mother too was a writer. She never took me in her arms, never comforted me when I had been crying, and I have no desire to grow like that—none whatever!”

By this time we had reached the hall and stood at the entrance of the corridor off which my room opened. Herr Claudius took off his spectacles and put them in his pocket, and though it was only Herr Claudius and I could not endure him, for all that his eyes were remarkably beautiful—they had just the same effect upon me as the full noonday sun. They looked mild and gentle, but if you sought to peer into them further your own drooped before the light that shone in them.

Now I was completely silenced. The spectacles had been my bulwark, and with them retreated every spark of courage I possessed into the furthest corner of my soul. Just then I heard footsteps approaching the house and Ilse's voice already in the distance saying:

“Don't take it ill of me, young lady, but that is a habit I cannot endure. A pretty young lady like you and smoking like a chimney!”

“Oh, you're only afraid that the brilliant *pensées* on your bonnet will be spoiled by the tobacco-smoke, Frau Ilse,” laughed Charlotte.

“Nonsense—never even thought of it; but I tell you what, if I thought that child there would ever put such a thing between her teeth I would pack up with her on the spot——”

She stopped, for she had come in and now saw us. Charlotte, who was beside her, had a cigarette between her coral lips, and her laughing face was enveloped in a thick cloud of tobacco-smoke, which she had doubtless puffed out purposely to shock Ilse. At the sight of Herr Claudius, however, she drew back in evident confusion; she colored violently and took the cigarette quickly out of her mouth. Her appearance made me inclined to laugh, and the dexterity with which she handled the cigarette won my admiration more strongly than ever.

Herr Claudius appeared not to notice her.

"You are right—don't allow that, Frau Ilse," he said quietly. "Your bonnet will not be the worse, indeed, for the tobacco-smoke; but it obscures the soft bloom and modesty of womanhood."

Charlotte flung the cigarette into the pond with a gesture of defiance and impatience.

"Have you attended to the invitations, Charlotte?" he inquired as quietly as though he were unconscious of the passion which worked in her fingers and flashed from her eyes.

"Not yet. Erdmann will take them toward evening——"

"Well, don't forget to send Helldorf a card."

"Helldorf, uncle!" she repeated in surprise, as though she could not believe her ears, while a bright flush suffused her cheeks.

"Yes, I wish him to dine with us to-morrow. Have you anything to say against it?"

"Oh, not that—but it is something new," she replied, hesitating.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, raised his hat, and went upstairs. He did not go into the library. I heard him open a door above it.

"Is the world suddenly turned upside down?" said Charlotte, who had stood motionless, listening to the retreating footsteps until the door had closed on them. "That will make a nice piece of work. I will give my head for a halfpenny if Eckhof doesn't sour our soup for us to-morrow."

"What has the old bookkeeper to do with the kitchen?" inquired Ilse irritably. His incessant singing had utterly ruined him in her opinion.

"My dear Frau Ilse," said Charlotte, "I will just give you one piece of information. In the business horizon of the Firma Claudius one sun alone circles in its orbit and that sun is—Herr Eckhof. Uncle Eric, of course, does as he pleases; but he still pays respect to the advice and wishes of this same old bookkeeper in a way that enables the modest luminary to be virtually ruler. Now, Eckhof and Helldorf are enemies to the death, whether rightly or wrongly I cannot say, and I care not the least about it, since both are utterly unknown to me. One thing alone I know, that to this hour Helldorf has never formed one of

a party here, simply because Herr Eckhof didn't wish it. Now, to-morrow he is all at once to take part at a dinner given by my uncle to some particular American friends. Eckhof will rage and storm and quote the ancient rules of the house; for this distinction about to be conferred on Helldorf has been hitherto confined to venerable bald-pates or firms of world-wide celebrity. I tell you the world is turned upside down, and it would not in the least surprise me if the statues yonder," pointing to a group in the center of the pond, "were to stand up, make a bow, and inform us that we are pretty girls."

I could not help laughing, and even Ilse grinned despite herself.

"What is Herr Claudius doing upstairs?" I inquired. I could not believe—indeed, the very idea irritated me—that "that dealer," as my father called him, should be walking about the domain of science.

"He is fumbling among his telescopes, no doubt. Haven't you seen the two excrescences on the Carolinen-lust? One forms the dome of the antique cabinet and the other Uncle Eric has arranged as an observatory. That looks, doesn't it, as if he too had some higher interests? Don't believe it. One is quite in keeping with the business; he counts the stars in the sky just as he does the thalers in the counting-house." She put her hand in her pocket and drew out a small, thin packet. "And now with regard to what I came about. Here are the stockings—a dozen pairs—that I wrote to K. for for you. They have just arrived, and to-morrow the dressmaker will bring your dress."

"Don't be deceived, miss; that's never a dozen," said Ilse, taking the little packet and weighing it on her broad hand. It looked like perhaps one pair of the famous haide woolen stockings. She opened the parcel, and an exquisitely fine, delicate fabric like lace fell out.

"So," she said grimly. "That is beautiful. The little one can run about barefooted in K. too; for these elegant things won't last long enough ever to see a bleach-green or a washing-line. Ah, my poor mistress' money!"

She left us standing there and went off angrily.

"Don't give in, little one," said Charlotte in her most decided tone. "I wear nothing else summer and winter, and if fifty Fräulein Fliedners turned up their noses at

such so-called extravagance, I have a sensitive Parisian skin, and you must make capital out of your position. *Basta!*"

She tripped away, and I followed Ilse with a somewhat anxious heart. She had just taken off her bonnet and laid it and her prayer-book aside. She was standing before the flower-table in my room, her color very high. The stand looked ill and neglected. I had looked on the flowers from the first with an unfavorable eye and had never watered them, though Ilse had given me strict orders to do so. And now the splendid blossoms were hanging their pretty heads low and faded.

Ilse never uttered a word, but simply pointed to my work. A spirit of contradiction and sulkiness came over me, and I grumbled out:

"What do I care about the table? I don't see why I should trouble myself about the flowers. I never asked Herr Claudius for them, so why does he have them put in my room? He may take care of them himself."

"That's right—you're improving," she said in a cold voice. "Lace on your feet and ingratitude in your heart. Lenore, you shall never return to the Dierkhof, and I—I will have nothing more to do with you."

With a loud scream I threw myself on her breast. Her voice had gone through my heart like a dagger.

"Your grandmother called you her little dove," she continued remorselessly. "A nice dove! If she had only known what was in you she would have called you——"

"Little devil," I put in, furious and enraged with myself. "Yes, Ilse, that is just what I am. I have a bad, wicked heart, but I never knew. and now it is always coming up."

XVIII.

THE next morning my father informed me that the Princess Margarethe wished to see me that evening at six o'clock. A footman came in addition to mention the hour I was to appear, the princess evidently knowing my father's memory was not trustworthy. Since yesterday too he had been far more absent and reserved than usual. About noon a very elegantly dressed gentleman, with a

little box under his arm, had been shown up to the library and remained there a long time in conversation with my father, and when at a later hour he went to the princess, he entirely forgot to bid me good-by. I heard his step in the hall and ran to meet him, and noticed the feverish flush of his cheek. His eyes had an unusual glitter in them, and his hair was tossed as if his hands had been incessantly run through it. Dinner-time came. I could eat but little. I felt so nervous and terrified at the prospect of seeing the princess, whom I pictured to myself dressed out in stiff brocades and a crown sparkling with jewels upon her head. Added to this, my father's appearance startled me. He never touched a morsel, but kept incessantly making little bread-pellets and staring at vacancy. He was evidently struggling with himself to say something. His eye fell every now and then inquiringly on Ilse, who all unconsciously eat away with excellent appetite, repeatedly assuring us that nowhere on earth were such mealy potatoes to be found as at the Dierkhof, because the soil there was sandy.

"My good Ilse, I want to ask you something," said my father suddenly, and the words sounded as short and confused as though they had been wrenched from him.

She looked up from her plate.

"Didn't you bring my mother's papers—her last bequests—here with you?"

"Yes, sir," she replied attentively, laying down her fork.

He put his hand in his breast-pocket and drew something out carefully which was wrapped up in silver paper. His hand trembled and his eyes glittered as he opened the soft silken case. A splendid and very large medal came to light.

"Look at that, Ilse. What do you think of it?"

"It is a beautiful thing," she said, nodding her head approvingly.

"And just think, it is to be had ridiculously cheap. For 3,000 thalers I can have a medal which among judges would fetch at least 12,000 thalers." His ordinarily gentle, quiet face lighted up with something of ecstasy. "It is the first happy chance in my existence. Hitherto I have obtained everything with heavy, oftentimes incalculable sacrifices, and just at this moment—

Ilse, dear Ilse, you would lay me under a life-long obligation if you would let me have 3,000 thalers of the money intrusted to your care. Lenore will be none the worse, for I pledge you my word this valuable article contains in itself three times the amount demanded."

"Yes, yes, that may be; but how? Is that worth it?" and she tipped the medal with her fingers so as to make my father shudder nervously.

"How do you mean?" he asked slowly.

"I mean would a merchant take it as payment?"

My father started back as though she had stabbed him.

"No, Ilse," he replied, after a dejected pause; "that is a mistake. This kind of money cannot pass in exchange; it can only be resold."

"So then the 3,000 thalers would lie in a box to be looked at, just for all the world like the broken stuff upstairs? But the child can neither feed nor clothe herself out of that. Sir, I told you on the spot the money was not to be touched. When I used to carry parcel after parcel to the post in Hanover, which I hated doing and always made a sour face at, my poor mistress used to say, 'Ilse, you don't understand. My son is a man of celebrity and this belongs to it.' I was dumb and couldn't understand for my life why your being a man of celebrity should make my mistress so poor and oblige her to sell all the old plate, rings, bracelets, and chains belonging to the Jacobsohn family. Still less can I comprehend that the child's little inheritance is now to be swallowed up also. Don't take it ill, sir, but it always seemed to me as if that inhuman quantity of money was buried in a great bottomless pit, for one never saw or heard more of it. It may be, to be sure, that it is in your business, and that later, when that is sold——"

My father bounded up. He could bear everything except the idea that a stranger's hand would ever meddle with his collections. He held up both his hands, enraged.

She paused a moment, then continued undismayed:

"Besides, I have no longer any power over the money. It lies now in the safe in the front house. You would not undertake the care of it, sir, so I gave it to Herr Claudius, and he is not a man to be played with, who takes to-day and gives back to-morrow, like some people."

My father wrapped up the medal without another word and put it in his pocket.

His depression went to my very heart, but there was nothing to be done. Ilse exhibited the utmost satisfaction at having placed the money in safe keeping. I was afraid of those hard light-colored eyes and did not venture on a word of remonstrance when my father had returned to the library.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the pretty little housemaid, who acted as Charlotte's maid too, came into my room. She had a small covered basket on her arm, and as the light breeze lifted the cloth thrown over it, tulle puffings trimmed with tiny black leaves peeped out.

"Fräulein Claudius sent me to try these on," she said, emptying the basket. While doing so she assured Ilse that the house in the front part was being turned out of the windows.

"Just think," she said; "we have gentlemen to dinner. Every one is on foot, running to and fro, when on a sudden Herr Claudius—can you believe it?—gives orders that the counting-house is to be removed to the yard, and without further delay of course all hands were at work. Just think, the counting-house where the Claudius' have worked for more than a hundred years! No one ever dared so much as to move a press, and now, of a sudden, all the musty, dusty affairs are to be removed carefully out of the dismal old room into one full of sunshine. They'll be astonished! And the upholsterer has been hanging up green curtains, because the light is too strong for Herr Claudius' weak eyes. Somebody should write a poem about it—nobody in the house can—but old Erdmann is going about quite pale. He thinks it means that the end of the world is coming."

I listened with only one ear—what did I care about Herr Claudius' counting-house? My eyes were engaged watching the marvels that the speaker's hands were unfolding. Ilse too watched each object with a critical glance, and her fingers to my horror kept pulling and dragging the light fabric of my dress to see how far it was durable. But when the waiting-maid finally drew a pair of fairy satin slippers from the bottom of the basket and held them up to my admiring gaze, Ilse abruptly and without a word left the room.

I had become wonderfully hardened, however. This exit of Ilse's did not give me the least trouble. On the contrary, I felt as if a stone were lifted off my breast as her skirt vanished through the door. Right and left the clumsy masterpieces of the haide shoemaker's craft were tossed away. Ilse was right: in the "lace" and satin I felt quite barefoot and as if the haide wind was playing round my feet once more.

Then the maid enveloped me in the cloud of gauze, sticking a black silk bow here and there—gossamer wherever I looked. It covered my arms and shoulders and flowed down from my waist to my feet; and I was to wear this—I? It was too much; I must run away.

"Stop! stop!" called out the maid. "The bow upon the left shoulder; you can't appear before any one without that."

But I had no ears for that. I was already flying through the hall, then over the bridge and through the flower-garden, my white garment floating round me like a summer cloud the while.

The front house had no horrors for me to-day. I ran up the winding stair to Charlotte's room, passing old Erdmann in the corridor standing as stiff as a poker and holding a napkin in his hand. His eyes grew round with amazement, and it struck me he tried to catch my dress to hold me back as I flew past. But what did it matter what the cross old creature wanted? I darted into the room without waiting.

The windows of this apartment looked into the garden and court, and despite the dismal effect of the dark carpet and heavy brown curtains it was the pleasantest place in the house. A splendid piano stood opposite the door, at which Charlotte was seated. Her fingers lay on the keys as if beginning to play. Fräulein Fliedner sat near her in a pearl-gray dress and pretty lace cap—more I did not see.

"Oh, Fräulein Charlotte," I exclaimed, "do look at me! What do you think of me now?" I held up one of the floating puffs. "Don't they look like wings—like real wings? Oh, and my shoes; you must see my shoes!" I lifted my dress gently and let the glossy satin appear. "Now you won't hear the 'patter, patter' that my horrid boots make. Just listen if there is a bit of noise as I walk along," and I marched up to them, stamping my

feet as the soldiers do. "I don't look a 'ridiculously dressed baby,' as Herr Eckhoff calls me, now, do I?"

"No, no, haide princess," she exclaimed. "Who could have imagined the chrysalis contained such a butterfly?"

She laughed and laughed till I thought she would never stop, and even Fräulein Fliedner held her handkerchief to her lips and looked with laughing eyes behind me—I supposed at the wall.

"Have you seen yourself in the glass yet?" asked Charlotte.

"Oh, no, I hadn't time; and besides, there is no need. I can see my dress and shoes just as well without one."

"Oh, but you must take one look," she said, laughing, and pointed to the lofty mirror which stood between the windows.

I turned unsuspectingly and glanced at it. I could not suppress a cry at the scene reflected therein and buried my face in my hands. The faintest recollection of the dinner-party in the front house had not even crossed my mind, and there I stood in the midst of the company. Behind me and facing the mirror stood folding doors leading into the reception-room. Hitherto I had always seen them locked, but to-day both sides were thrown wide open and Dagobert stood on the threshold. His brown eyes met mine laughingly. He wore a crimson collar round his throat and gold glittered on his shoulders and breast; he was evidently in uniform. Behind him were several other gentlemen apparently much amused, and on a sofa near, beside an old gentleman, sat Herr Claudius. One glance showed me all this.

I trembled violently and tears of shame and vexation rushed to my eyes, when suddenly two cool hands were laid on mine and drew them gently down. Herr Claudius had sprung up and was standing before me.

"You are startled, Fräulein von Sassen," he said. "It was a naughty jest of Charlotte's. She must beg your pardon for it."

He led me to an arm-chair and made me lean back on the cushions.

"I think you may begin your speech now," he said, turning to Charlotte.

"Instantly, uncle dear." She flew up to me, sank on one knee, and took my hand. "Will your highness deign

to pardon a poor penitent," she begged playfully, "who implores forgiveness? But only from you, haide princess. From all the others I demand thanks for having prolonged so pretty a sight."

I had to laugh, though tears still stood in my eyes. How could she fall on her knee thus before so many strangers? That specially awoke my astonishment and admiration, for I myself would rather have crept into a mouse-hole!

She stroked my hair caressingly, and then rising, seated herself once more at the piano.

She played with great execution, but with too much force. The instrument trembled beneath her hands, and I longed for the haide to soften the loud passages: between four walls they reverberated through one's head. But, notwithstanding, I was heartily grateful for the music—it drew the attention of the company from me; and after a little time, during which I sat motionless, buried in the arm-chair as in a sheltering haven, I ventured to lift my eyes.

The old bookkeeper was the first person I saw; he was sitting in the window, half-concealed by a curtain. Charlotte was right—"he was furious." Yesterday his wrath had reminded me of a prophet denouncing sin and the solemn pathos of his voice and bearing had caused me fear, but to-day he seemed only a very angry man who restrained his passion with difficulty. His left hand, sparkling with jewels, lay clinched upon the window-sill, and his noble profile, which was partially turned toward me, was disfigured by its angry expression and drawn-down mouth. The whole company seemed to have incurred his displeasure, for he sat with his back turned toward them. Young Helldorf, the object of his dislike, stood leaning against the door I had entered by. He was perhaps the most attentive and gratified auditor in the room. He never once moved, and his eyes remained riveted on the player, as though under a spell. Herr Claudius seemed of quite a different opinion, and at every "crescendo" knit his brows and shook his head disapprovingly. So then here too he was playing the part of judge—the shopman!

I suddenly felt a gentle movement of my chair, and looking round saw Dagobert behind me. He was leaning familiarly on the back, and as I looked up startled bent

down toward me, looking into my eyes, and whispered low, while the piano prevented any one else hearing him:

“Are you going to the princess to-day?”

I bent my head.

“Then think of me a little, I implore you, in the paradise you are entering.”

A kind of giddiness came over me. This whispered entreaty which sounded so soft and fervent produced an indescribable effect upon me. I to bestow a favor on him, who had ridiculed and laughed at me in the haide—this Tancred whose beauty and military attire made him look like a king among the merchants around! The blood rushed up to my temples and I hung down my head without answering. I was proud and delighted, but I must not let the others see it.

When the music ended and the usual compliments and thanks had been paid the guests began to disperse. Helldorf among the rest took up his hat, but Herr Claudius gave him a sign, and I heard him say to the young man in a low voice:

“Stay a little longer. I should like to hear you sing. I have heard a great deal of your baritone.”

Amid the general leave-taking I slipped into the next room in hope of finding a way out into the corridor. My unexpected entrance and my position altogether were so ridiculous that I feared Charlotte’s ridicule when we were left alone, and preferred trying to escape her presence for to-day.

The room in which I found myself opened into a large saloon, where the company had dined, and an open door led from it to the corridor. I saw old Erdmann still marching up and down the latter, like a sentinel on duty. The table in the center and the sideboard both groaned beneath the wealth of silver which they presented to view. I glanced carelessly at it and then at one of the walls, where my attention was suddenly riveted.

There was the splendid officer, as Charlotte had called him, gazing down at me from that heavy carved frame! A proud, handsome face with a smile full of life and conscious victory on the full lips! And that white hand which looked so powerful and yet lay with such careless grace on the table—that very hand had raised the deadly weapon and with a single pressure destroyed the clear,

radiant brow forever! Had he done the dreadful deed in the Carolinenlust? Had my feet ever rested on the spot where that head lay dashed to pieces? How many a time had Heinz told me that those guilty of suicide "were condemned to wander up and down at night and find no rest." If at midnight he really did glide through the sealed rooms above; if he came down the dark, narrow stair and moved the trunk near my bed noiselessly aside. I almost screamed aloud with terror at the thought, but I turned resolutely away from those brilliant life-like eyes gazing at me out of the picture and saw Herr Claudius come into the room, looking around as if in search of something. Forgetting entirely all timidity or even caution, I pointed to the face which had aroused my fears.

"Did that awful misfortune take place in the Carolinenlust?" broke from my lips.

He recoiled, the red blood rushed over his face, and his eyes flashed fire.

"Child, do you know of what you are speaking?" he said gloomily. "I must request these untamed tongues to take a little better care of themselves." He was silent for a moment and fixed his gaze on his brother's face. "No," he then said in a milder tone, "it did not happen at the Carolinenlust. Does the idea make you feel nervous?"

"I—I am afraid of ghosts, and so is Heinz, and so is Ilse, only she would not say so."

A grave smile played about his mouth.

"I too sometimes see ghosts, and just at this moment more than ever," he said, and I could not tell whether he spoke in jest or earnest. "You are going to court to-day?"

I could not help laughing inwardly; he put the very same question as Dagobert.

"Yes," I replied, "and I must make haste, for we are to be at the castle at six o'clock."

I was about to fly off rapidly, but he detained me with a gentle grasp.

"Reflect, then, upon yourself, that you may not lose yourself in the court atmosphere," he said warningly and with a peculiar intonation as he raised his forefinger.

It was strange, but for the first time certainly that voice went to my heart. Ah! that was the advice of the man who never thought but of himself. How differently had Dagobert spoken!

I shook my head, rushed out, and dashed upstairs. How fortunate was it that Ilse had not seen that rebellious shake of my head! What a moral sermon it would have brought upon me!

XIX.

I FOUND the maid still waiting in my room. She took possession of me at once, fastened on the bow which was wanting, and set a little white hat on my head.

I gave one look at the glass and discovered suddenly that my despised hair, which I had always regarded as a wearisome burden, fell in pretty glossy black ringlets over my neck and contrasted beautifully with the snow-white ribbons of my hat. Ilse's sharp eyes caught me in the act of this my first self-inspection, and her stern, weather-beaten face appeared suddenly in the mirror above my head with an expression of great displeasure.

"Well, is the fool of fashion ready now?" said she reprovingly. "Never yet did any really modest woman stare at herself to see if her nose is set right on her face. Do you know that it's a sin? Ah! if my poor mistress had only taken away the looking-glass from Christine in time she would never have gone through all she did. I'll cover the glass before I go away, that it may be different with you."

She would have no need for that. I could not indeed see the sin of the action, for had not the good God given me my face? But I did see what an absurdity it was to gaze at one's self, and I grew scarlet at the thought and felt as much ashamed as if I had committed some egregious blunder.

The housemaid went away with a half-laughing, half-commiserating glance at me, and I ran up to the library to fetch my father.

As I reached the door I heard him walking up and down hurriedly and talking aloud. I supposed somebody was with him and opened the door softly, but he was alone and evidently in a state of great excitement. He strode the apartment incessantly, running both hands through his hair meanwhile. Occasionally he stopped, took up

the medal which he had shown Ilse to-day, gazed at it as though his eyes would pierce the lifeless medal, and laid it down again with a heavy sigh. Then he would strike the table with his thin hand till it shook beneath it and begin his roaming walk again. Although I had been several minutes in the room, he had never observed me.

"Father, what is the matter?" I asked at last timidly.

He turned round and for a moment did not recognize me in my new dress. I laughed and ran toward him. His depressed, agitated face brightened with a kind smile, which irradiated it like a sunbeam and filled me with delight.

"Ah, Lorchén!" he exclaimed, "what a pretty little maiden you are!"

He took my two hands and looked at me from head to foot. My heart bounded with inexpressible pleasure and gratitude to him. In the midst of all his scientific cares and troubles he had still a thought left to bestow on my little self.

"Are we not soon going, father?" I asked, and gathering up all my courage I smoothed his ruffled hair and arranged his satin cravat, which presented a very disheveled appearance. "The princess expects us perhaps. Oh, how frightened I feel at the thought!"

"I am waiting for a gentleman whom I am to bring to the duke," he answered shortly, without noticing the last part of my speech. The cheerful manner had altogether disappeared again, and withdrawing from my arranging hands he resumed his walk. In the space of two minutes his hair was once more standing upright to my great dismay.

"Won't you tell me what is grieving you so?" I asked imploringly.

He paced toward me, with his hands folded behind him.

"Oh, my child, I can't tell you that. I don't even know how to begin so as you could understand. What a herculean task I had with Ilse already to-day!" he exclaimed almost impatiently and strode away again.

I did not allow myself, however, to be thus daunted without another effort.

"It's quite true that I am dreadfully stupid, coming from the haide," I answered candidly, "but for all that

perhaps I could understand you better than you think. Try me just this once."

He smiled half-bitterly and unwillingly, but took the medal up and held it toward me.

"Well, look here. This is a great rarity. It is called a medallion. It is not in my collection, for up to the present I have not been able to get it." He held it up to the light with a beaming face. "Splendid! The gentleman whom I am waiting for is going to sell this invaluable specimen. Do you understand me, my child?"

"Not all the expressions you use, father, but I know quite well what you mean. You would like not to let the medal out of your own hands."

"Child, I would give years of my life joyfully to be able to buy it," he interrupted enthusiastically, "but, alas! I cannot, and within an hour's time the duke will have secured this exquisite specimen for his medallion cabinet, and I——"

He stopped, for the gentleman who had been in the library with him the previous day entered the room, carrying a box under his arm. I saw my father turn pale.

"Well, what have you to say, Herr von Sassen?" inquired the stranger.

"I—must renounce——"

"Father," I exclaimed eagerly, "I will get you what you want."

"You, my little maiden! How would you set about it?"

"Leave that to me. But I must have the medal to show in case I need it."

Oh, how resolute and practical I had suddenly become! I was quite proud of myself and wished Ilse could see me!

My father smiled incredulously, but it was a ray of hope and he accepted it at such a moment. He looked inquiringly at the stranger, who bent his head in assent, wrapped the medallion up in paper, and delivered it into my keeping. I put it in my pocket and held it there with a convulsive grasp, for I knew how precious it was, while I ran toward the front house.

How I would implore Herr Claudius to give me 3,000 thalers! In what moving words would I depict my father's distress to him! If he was not made of stone through and through he must be touched by the child's

entreaty for her father, whom she would so dearly love to see happy! Never, indeed, had such an indescribable feeling of shyness toward him overpowered me as at the moment when, inwardly trembling, I reëntered the cool, dark house as a petitioner which I had only just quitted in undisguised and impertinent rebellion. But onward! It must be done! I loved my father far too well not to be willing to sacrifice something for his sake and to persevere patiently in my entreaties notwithstanding the cold business-like manner which Herr Claudius would be sure to assume toward me. Ah, had he not given me 400 thalers for my aunt, and why should he refuse me the 3,000 now? I should only be obliged to sign my name a second time, and the matter would be accomplished!

Erdmann and the housemaid were just carrying down a trayful of the dishes as I ran upstairs. The dining-room door was still standing wide open. If Herr Claudius happened to be still in Charlotte's room he might possibly see me through the open door without others observing me, for I was anxious there should be no witness to my petitioning.

Just as I was about to enter the room two glorious voices broke upon my ear. I stood as if rooted to the spot, although the very ground beneath my feet seemed on fire and every lost moment made my heart beat with anxiety.

“ Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee ! ”

Charlotte and Helldorf were singing it, and across the room I could see their two splendid figures standing near each other, while Dagobert sat at the piano accompanying them.

Oh, my haide, when the “angry airt” blew over thee; when it passed over the Dierkhof trying to bear down the old pillars and tear away the window-frames; when it raged through the oak trees and tore in pieces the venerable crown of the last year's withered leaves; when Ilse with careful foresight shut every door and chased the hens from their large exposed yard to their roosting-place in the barn, then I used to escape from the prison and cry

aloud to the spirits of the air. This was no storm like those of winter. It was only the wakening up and jubilant rejoicing of the thousand voices which had been asleep. The water which had escaped from the grasp of the ice; the wood where a thousand sources of life were swelling; every little flower-bell bursting from its guardian sheath—all, all swelled the tumult, and I allowed it to carry me along with it, step by step like a leaf before the wind, until I stood upon the hill and, half-terrified, half-triumphant, clasped my arms around the good old pine. We quaked and shook together, the dear old tree and I, but it rustled its needles merrily, and I laughed as I watched the thick black clouds sail onward. My dress was torn and rumped, my hair flew wildly in my face, but I needed "no plaidie to shelter me." There was something of steel and iron in my strong young hands and feet. I struggled bravely and ordered and scolded Spitz home; he had meantime been warming his coat at the fire.

"And should misfortune's bitter blast
Around thee blow."

So sang the voices within, and they floated upward as the storm breaks and culminates in power. I was intoxicated with the sound, yet I dare not yield to the fascination any longer—away this home-sickness, with its bitter-sweet remembrances. I saw my father pacing the library excitedly, and that impelled me forward to the threshold.

There sat Herr Claudius, buried in one corner of the room, quite alone. He was leaning his elbows on the arms of the chair and his eyes and forehead were concealed by his hand. His thick curly hair fell over his white fingers. I started back. Even the dead silvery shine of his hair had an intimidating and chilling effect upon me, and I could not recall one word of the touching, heroic speech I had composed. In his presence I was only conscious that he would reject my request very politely and kindly, yet at the same time so decidedly that to add another word would seem to be importunate; and though he was sitting there to all appearances lost in the touching song, he was in reality occupied in reckoning, and I knew the moment I mentioned the "three thousand" he would smile and repeat once more: "You have evidently no idea how large a sum of money that is."

Notwithstanding all this, in a few minutes I was standing beside him. How I had got over the intervening steps I scarcely knew myself. I bent toward him and softly pronounced his name. I had not intended to startle him thus, but he bounded up as if the last trumpet had sounded in his ear; he looked round and smiled; I knew why. How could any one be startled by such a morsel of humanity who had hopped up noiselessly like a little wren beside him?

He was not angry, I could see that; and yet not a word could I utter. If he had only had on the spectacles and the broad-brimmed hat; but here he looked so young all at once with his magnificent blue eyes. I felt myself so silly, and it never occurred to him to help me out of my difficulty. He remained silent while they sang on:

“Thy shield should be my bosom
To share it a’——”

“Do you wish to speak to me?” he inquired at last as the singing ended.

“Yes, Herr Claudius, but not here.”

He took me at once to the other room and closed both doors.

With my eyes fixed on one of the squares in the polished mosaic floor I began my story and succeeded. I recovered the thoughts and words I had before prepared. I pictured to him my father’s intense anxiety to possess the medal; that he could neither eat nor drink with excitement; that I was unable to bear the sight of his suffering and must find out the means somewhere to get the 3,000 thalers at any price. Then I looked up at him.

He looked exactly as if he was standing in the counting-house below, near his great folios—the picture of an attentive listener, of the coolest deliberation and caution.

“Is that your own idea, or did Herr von Sassen previously express a wish to take this sum from your capital?” he inquired—and how coldly the tone fell on my ear in answer to my eager eloquence; how it annoyed me! Still, I could not lie to those clear eyes nor yet find any means of hiding the truth, much as I felt tempted to it for a moment.

“My father expressed the wish to Ilse this afternoon,” I replied, hesitating.

“And she refused?”

I assented sorrowfully. I knew the cause was already lost.

“Do you not know yourself, then, Fräulein von Sassen, that I could still less dare or be willing to give it to you?”

Forgotten was the resolution to observe an humble demeanor and keep my patience in the face of this mercantile calculation and calm. I felt my cheeks growing red and “my wicked heart getting the better of me.”

“No doubt I knew it,” I answered hastily, pointing to the doorway. “There I stood trembling with horror. But I love my father and was willing to make such a heavy sacrifice for him.”

He never uttered a word as I paused a moment—he really was made of stone; all my representations had actually gone for nothing, and he wasn’t even angry. I could scarcely keep my feet from stamping on the floor, so I turned my back on him in a rage and said, looking back over my shoulder:

“I won’t have the money now. Ridiculous that I should have to come and beg from strangers what my dear grandmother left me as a present; but if it was mine ten times over and I had the right to dispose of it——”

“At this present moment you haven’t a right to dispose of one penny of it,” he said, without the least annoyance, but very gravely and impressively. “And this much I must tell you, that when you come to me in that unbecoming manner, as the wild haide child, you will never get anything from me. You may climb trees and wade through rivers to your heart’s content—those wings shall not be clipped; but the savage nature must be driven from your soul.”

And so he was going to fetter me with those iron fingers and never let me loose again till the two years were at an end! What a wretched caricature he would make of me.

“If I allow you,” said I, throwing back my head. “Heinz once caught a raven, and as he was going to clip its wings the bird bit his finger to the bone.”

“And you intend to defend yourself with equal courage, little haide lark?” he said, smiling and glancing down upon his slender fingers. “The naughty raven was not able to understand that Heinz intended to make him into a trusty companion. But now we will talk more about

this money matter. I must not play fast and loose with your fortune, any more than you may yourself; but on the other hand I am quite ready to advance your father the requisite sum for the medal from my own resources. Did you say that the owner is at this very moment with your father?"

Much ashamed, I felt in my pocket for the medallion.

"Oh, an imperial medal of the time of the Antonines. A fine specimen," he said.

He stepped to the window and examined it on every side again, as if he understood something of that too.

"Come," he said, opening the door to the right.

Heavy draperies hung on the walls, and it was as dismal as the whole suit in that range. Near one of the windows stood a cabinet of dark carved wood inlaid with silver.

Herr Claudius opened the wonderful old-fashioned piece of furniture and took out a box, in which lay a whole row of medals similar to that my father had designated as so rare. They were arranged on a dark velvet background. He took out one and laid it on the palm of his hand beside the one I had brought, compared them carefully, and held them toward me.

They were as like each other as two peas, only the one taken from the case was visibly better cast.

"This is the prettiest," I said, pointing to the medal my father was longing for.

"I believe you," he replied. "But I do not like it."

At this moment the door leading into the dining-room was opened, and on turning round we both saw Dagobert standing on the threshold. Herr Claudius frowned, but the young man was not to be put off thus. He advanced nearer and his brown eyes wandered over the row of medals in amazement.

"Goodness, how magnificent! Are you a collector, uncle?" he asked in surprise.

"Somewhat, as you see."

"And no one knows a word of it!"

"Is it necessary that my little fancies should be known to the public?"

How calmly proud that sounded.

"Well, not exactly that," replied Dagobert, "but at a time when the whole residenz is engrossed with a real fever of interest in antiquities this passivity is quite inconceivable."

"Do you think so? Well, I confess I rarely find pleasure in anything which is 'the fashion' in the great world and which is used by many for quite other purposes than the advancement of science. I am also on my guard against such inclinations. I never bring them into competition. Under such influences they get the mastery of us, and a passion thus allowed to get head will stop at nothing; it will not spare the holiest and most sacred, but would even take the plate from off the altar if need be."

"Well, your presentiments will save you from that sin, uncle," laughed Dagobert. He shook his head. "Incredible! You are interested in antiquities, and yet allowed a valuable collection of them to remain long years untouched in the cellars below."

Herr Claudius shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"You might think differently were you to see my grandfather's will. In accordance with his desire these antiquities should have remained buried forever."

"Ah! So, then, Herr von Sassen ought to feel proud that his request has effected the overthrow of the profound traditions of the house."

"Not so much he as my own final conviction that neither my grandfather nor I had any right to deprive the world of these art treasures and to allow them to disappear for evermore."

This answer came very quietly.

I stood on pins and needles during this conversation; the precious time was passing. To my comfort Dagobert went to the window to inspect a carriage that was passing. Herr Claudius, however, put the medallion back into the box and returned me the medal.

"I am sincerely sorry that I must take back my promise," he said to me, "but I would not be a party to the purchase of such a medal as that. The medallion you hold in your hand is not real."

Dagobert turned round.

"Who wanted to buy the medal?" he inquired.

"Herr von Sassen."

"What, uncle, he thinks the medal valuable and you would correct him? Excuse me, but it escaped me involuntarily; it was not polite," he added, immediately apologizing.

Herr Claudius smiled gently.

"You have only indorsed my own opinion, that the novice is wise in keeping his wisdom to himself. His opinion in comparison with that of an authority will always be regarded as presumption."

He closed the cabinet, and I left the room with head erect. Dagobert accompanied me to the door.

"Impudent," he muttered between his teeth, but so that I could hear him, as he passed on to his sister's room, while I ran off shy and silent.

Yes, it was impudence toward my father of world-wide celebrity. I ran like one hunted through the garden and tore up the stairs at the Carolinenlust.

"Well?" asked my father in breathless suspense as I entered the room.

"Herr Claudius maintains that the medal is not real," I repeated in a stifled voice.

The stranger burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter—he seemed indeed as though he could not leave off. My father, on the other hand, shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"What else can you expect from a merchant spirit? One ought not to meddle with such people."

He grasped his hat, stuck it on his tumbled hair, and gave me his arm.

"Let us go," he said in a tone of resignation.

XX.

WITH rapid steps we hastened through the garden. My father was soon utterly unconscious that a nervous little maiden was tripping by his side and skipping along on her tiptoes like a flake of snow. He talked to the strange gentleman without intermission, and to my great annoyance in the same unintelligible language which the professor in the haide had used.

We heard Helldorf's glorious voice as we passed through the yard; he was singing alone. My father suspended his rapid pace for one moment in surprise. So far I had never sought to make further researches in the yard—it was too bare and empty for my taste; but now that we were crossing to go out by the great gate I had a complete view

of the ground-floor belonging to the front house. Four windows, running parallel with one another, were each partially open, and a perfect flock of young girls were sitting within. The wainscoting was very low and enabled one to see the busy nimble fingers at work. At the window nearest me a young girl held up a myrtle wreath to try how it looked before adding the next sprig.

And so, then, that was the "back room" about which Charlotte had given me such a fright the very day after my arrival. It did not appear to me either dark or forbidding; there was plenty of air and light, and the girls were remarkably clean and well dressed. All these young heads, dark and fair, were listening to the singing. Not a lip moved, when all at once I saw a sudden thrill of terror run through the whole party and every head bent low over their work. The girl with the myrtle wreath pushed the window to with her elbow, unobserved, and turned her flushed face toward the inner part of the room. A door banged violently within, and immediately after the old bookkeeper's voice was heard scolding.

"What a draught!" he exclaimed, his sonorous voice echoing the louder through the yard because the singing had for a moment ceased. "Ah, I see, the windows have been opened to listen to the illusive voice of Satan and thus indulge in idleness! Ye foolish virgins! 'It is better to listen to the reproof of the wise than to the song of fools.' "

While he gave utterance to this sentence he banged the windows to and shook them to make sure that none of that earthly sound could penetrate. He saw us passing by, but he took no notice whatever and retained his haughty demeanor.

My father laughed ironically.

"There is another regular pope," he said to the stranger. "One of those narrow-minded individuals which a strong reaction of the times has produced. The next generation will doubtless look back with scorn on these spots on the sun of our day."

How I pitied the poor young things in the back room! Their wings had been cruelly cut, too, and not a trace of the "savage element" now remained; on the contrary, they were prisoners against their will. Meekly they bowed their heads and submitted to be deprived even of the fresh

air because forbidden sounds had reached their ears. And it was the horrid daily singer himself who had the task of clipping their wings and watching them. Oh, Herr Claudius, you shall find more trouble at my hands yet. I could have run away like a hare, and if no sheltering roof were to be found about here, one fine morning I would just return whence I had come. Not indeed to the Dierkhof, where Ilse would scold me, but to the little mud cabin with the bottle-green windows—there would I share Heinz' buckwheat meal and fly all day long over the haide with unshorn pinions!

We had left the house in the Mauerstrasse behind and were now treading the ugly, dusty streets which I had never wished to see again; still, they no longer seemed so bad since the burning noonday sun was not shining on them. Much else had changed too. I no longer met glances of ridicule. Women passed who looked kindly at me and who peeped inquiringly under my hat, as though they really wished to see what kind of face the tripping little lassie in holiday attire had. One thing, however, produced a great and peculiar effect on me and caused me to hold my head at least several inches higher, and that was the manner in which my father was greeted. The man himself as he hastily passed along, with the careless attitude and dreadfully wild-looking hair, was anything but an imposing object, and yet officers and elegantly dressed gentlemen bowed low before him with the deepest respect; and distinguished ladies, driving in magnificent carriages, nodded their heads to him and smiled, as though he were their most familiar friend. This profound respect was all directed to this widely celebrated man whose head was the receptacle of such wondrous stores of knowledge. Every one bent before him with one exception—the merchant in the Mauerstrasse. He, forsooth, knew everything better!

In no genial humor did I think upon that scene before the medallion cabinet; and what annoyed me most was the impression I had myself received on that occasion. The man had stood there as if really endowed with superior power, as though his every word rested on as solid a foundation as his own old business, and—worst of all—the brilliant young officer, in all his elegance and manly beauty, had been a moment completely thrown into the

shade beside that man in the simple black coat. What a metamorphosis! That was the "quiet old gentleman" who had appeared so utterly insignificant in my eyes on the top of the Hun tombs—on whom I had scarcely even deigned to look!

We had to walk a considerable distance before we reached the ducal castle. A footman preceded us to announce our arrival, and while the seller of the medals waited in an anteroom, my father led me through the saloons. Once again he ran his fingers through his hair, then pushed me gently through the door which the footman threw open.

The dreaded moment then had arrived, against which the untutored haide child had with well-grounded instinct fought with all her might. My *début* was indeed pitiable, Charlotte had shown me the way I ought to bow; but, alas! Spitz made a far better hand of the little tricks which Heinz had taught him. My "quicksilver soles" felt riveted to the spot where my father had left me standing. I saw nothing beneath my downcast eyelids save one small square at my feet, and I heard nothing but the rustling of silken garments, saying to myself, the while that rising tears of vexation rose and were swallowed down again, that I was like nothing, standing there so awkward and simple, but a coarsely hewn-out statue. Suddenly the lovely tones of a soft bell-like voice fell on my ear—the princess was saluting my father—and a moment afterward a hand touched my chin and raised my drooping head. I looked up then, and no sparkling coronet dazzled my frightened eyes. I saw wonderful thick brown curls shading a face of rosy hue, and a pair of bright eyes, as blue as those of my favorite butterflies in the haide, smiled down upon me. I knew that the princess was no longer young. She was the reigning duke's aunt and a contemporary of my mother's. I thought, consequently, that this tall slight figure, with the velvet complexion and soft youthful profile, could not be the Princess Margarethe. My father informed me otherwise.

"Your highness sees now," he said, while a suppressed laugh trembled in his voice, "how right I was in begging for unlimited forbearance. My shy daisy hangs her head helplessly."

"We will soon alter all that," replied the princess, smil-

ing. "I know how to deal with nervous, timid little maidens such as she is. Go now, dear doctor, the duke is expecting you. Auf Wiedersehen * at tea."

My father left the room, and I now stood there left to myself in the insidious atmosphere of the court in its dangerous precincts. I saw now that the princess was not alone. A few steps behind her stood a pretty young girl; the princess presented us to each other, and I learned from that that she was a maid of honor, and that her name was Constance von Wildenspring. Before I had time even to think of it the young lady's nimble fingers had dexterously divested me of my hat and mantilla and I was placed opposite the princess, while the young lady sat a little distance off, behind one of the window-curtains, working.

How admirably the princess understood the art of untying the bann of timidity which separated the "shy little maiden" from her. She related how often my mother and she had been together at the court at L'schen; what a happy, merry time it had been; how much talent and information my mother had had, and what very beautiful verses she had written. At the same time she showed me a thick book, bound in red morocco—it contained poems and a drama written by the deceased which had appeared a short time before her death. Most young girls in my position would have been pleased to find such a favorable preparation for them on their first appearance at court, and would have considered it as a piece of good fortune. I felt nothing of the kind. With a kind of painful aversion I gazed at the book. The pictures in it, then, were to blame that my early childhood had been robbed of the sunshine of a mother's love. While the authoress of them had been cherishing and cultivating the forms of her fancy in the light, airy drawing-rooms, the soul of her child had been starved and famished between the four gloomy walls of that back chamber.

Perhaps some suspicion of the tenor of my thoughts dawned upon the princess—I had already told her no effort on my part would enable me to recall my mother's face. At all events, she insensibly turned the conversation to my own past life, and with that the remains of my embarrassment entirely fled. I related everything and

* To meet again—*au revoir*.

paraded Heinz, Ilse, Mieke, and the merry chirping magpies on the oak tree tops through the princess' apartments; the old fir tree too shook its needles there, and from the turf-mold and bog arose the water-sprites and floated about there in their white garments, with heavy moist borders, through the deadly still haide. I brought forward the snow-storm, too, playing around the Dierkhof roof gables, and how I used to sit near Heinz on the stove bench while the roasting apples crackled and sputtered in the hot oven.

Now and then the pretty lady-in-waiting stared at me in blank amazement from behind the curtain and regarded me with a stare of mock and derisive terror. But that did not affect me. The princess' large eyes grew brighter and brighter and rested on me with ever-increased depth. She listened just as attentively, I might almost say breathlessly, as Heinz and Ilse used to do when I used to read aloud the fairy-tales in the fleet.

And I told her of the lizards, of the bees, and of the ants—they had been my companions, and I was as well acquainted with all their arrangements, all their habits and occupations as I was with the household management of the Dierkhof. I confessed that all animals, even the ugliest and most insignificant, were dear to me, because there was vitality in them, and the faint sounds their voices and motions made broke through the deep solitude of the haide. I don't know how it came about, but finally even the great Hun grave came in for a representation, and there I sat on its summit, amid the golden broom, with outstretched arms, and sang out into the interminable waste.

The princess drew me suddenly to her, took both my hands, and kissed me on the forehead.

"I should like to know how the solitary young voice sounded in the haide," she said.

I shrank back indeed with timidity and horror at the thought of my own voice reverberating against those four walls; but a kind of spell was upon me. Had I already become mistress of myself, and was one part of my child's life played out? I gathered up all my courage and sang a little song.

Once, just in the midst of my singing, I was put out—the gray eyes of the young court lady glowed and varied

so strangely from behind the curtain. Involuntarily I thought of the cat at the Dierkhof as she watched the poor little twittering bird on the mountain-ash bough with her glittering green eyes. But what was the little lady's displeasure to me? I was not singing for her, and my voice should not tremble on her account. I let it out, therefore, with all its power and sang courageously to the end.

While I had been making these communications two footmen had noiselessly brought in a ready-laid table, covered with everything for tea, and just as my last tones died away a gentleman in a black frock coat entered the room. He bowed low, then raising himself rapidly, he clapped his delicate kid gloves together in applause with undeniable grace.

"Wonderful, your highness! on my word, *magnifique!*" he exclaimed in raptures as he eagerly but at the same time with noiseless footsteps approached the princess. "But what cruelty to us all, your highness," he continued in reproachful tones; and letting his graceful arms droop in an attitude of dejection, this thoroughly elderly personage absolutely assumed the air and manners of a young girl. "For years we have been entreating, on bended knee, for but one tone from that throat which is veritably a nightingale's—and in vain! Like a thief, like some unfortunate condemned to banishment must one linger outside the threshold if once again one would taste the long-denied delight. What, do you call that an injured, ruined voice? That softness, that bell-like fullness of tone? Oh, your highness!"

He cast up his eyes to heaven and kissed every finger of her hand. I was quite confounded. This kind of man was quite as new to me as an inhabitant of Otaheite would have been. His rather deep voice and carefully trimmed beard recalled my senses, else I should certainly have vowed he was one of the court ladies dressed in a coat.

"My good Herr von Wismar," said the princess with a suppressed laugh, "in former days I must plead guilty to having oftentimes wearied those around me with indulging in melodies sung in a voice which was even at that time very weak and very indifferent, but you ought not to remind me of that, more especially as I atoned for it by leaving off in good time. However, I observe with the

greatest satisfaction that my musical misdemeanors are all happily forgotten when our noble chamberlain has seen fit to exalt my contralto to a bell-like soprano, the poor little linnet to a nightingale. Sidonie sang beautifully—but I, never.”

The “noble chamberlain” stood there somewhat disconcerted. His long face was too amusing. I tittered inwardly, just as I had always done when Heinz had been paralyzed by some unexpected turn of things.

Fräulein von Wildenspring had risen suddenly at the princess’ last words. She gave a furious glance at my merry face and placed herself at the tea-table.

“But, your highness, the comparison is a very true one,” she whispered forth as she busied herself with the tea-pot. “Although Herr von Wismar makes a mistake with regard to the kind of voice, still your highness did sing beautifully. Gräfin Fernau still becomes quite excited when she speaks of it.”

“Oh, my dear Constance, is that your only authority?” laughed the princess. “Our good Fernau has been stone deaf for the last twenty-five years!”

“But papa and mamma are enthusiastic about it too,” persevered the young lady, who nevertheless let her eyes droop beneath the sarcastic glance of her patroness.

“Pray turn your eyes and your compliments toward your right, Herr von Wismar,” said the princess, pointing with her hand in my direction. “There is the nightingale.”

The gentleman turned round; till that moment he had not observed me, because my small person was concealed by a stand of gigantic plants. The princess mentioned my name. I rose at the low reverence which the gentleman made me, laughed in his very face, and made him such a deep and successful courtesy that Charlotte would have died of laughing had she seen it. The demon of mischief which, since my grandmother’s death, seemed to have gone to sleep, woke up all at once and restored the power of movement to me once more.

Herr von Wismar at once launched forth into a strain of compliments, which compared my father’s simple daisy to a bright rose-bud and raised me to the position of a fairy vision. He gently chided “the good doctor” for having hitherto deprived the court of my enchanting presence and for having left me too long at school.

"What school were you brought up at, may I ask?" he inquired finally.

"In a country village, Herr von Wismar," said Fräulein von Wildenspring with the innocent smile of a child.

The chamberlain was stunned; but a glance at the princess' face looking so kindly at me speedily restored his equanimity.

"Oh, thence comes the delicious spring-like freshness of her voice. The country air, yes, the country air! What an acquisition it would be at our court concerts, your highness—so chaste, so perfectly untouched——"

"What an idea, Herr von Wismar," interrupted the young maid of honor. "Fräulein von Sassen cannot possibly bear a comparison with our superb prima donna from the court theater—no, I should really feel sorry for her in such a position."

"Look after your tea, Constance," said the princess. "I fear it will get bitter. Besides, you may be quite at ease. I shall certainly not accept the proposition. Rare guests should be guarded like the apple of the eye, and this refreshing breeze from the haide which has suddenly burst into our sultry atmosphere from the distant 'country village' shall be kept for myself alone."

Fräulein von Wildenspring was silent. She seized the tea-pot and poured out the first brown and undrinkable infusion into the silver slop-bowl so suddenly and violently that the damask cloth was all sprinkled over with the brown drops.

"And you are living now with your papa in Claudius' house?" inquired Herr von Wismar suddenly as he caught the haughty and reproving glance with which the princess measured her awkward lady-in-waiting. The chamberlain seemed to act as a kind of lightning conductor at court.

"We live in the Carolinenlust," I replied.

"Ah, in poor Lothar's rooms," he remarked in a tone of regret to the princess.

"Oh, dear, no," I replied eagerly, "not in them—they are sealed."

I remarked a faint color rise on the princess' cheek and spread up to the roots of her curly hair. She had caught hold of one of the overhanging blossoms of a *Hortensia* with both her hands as it stood on a table near her, and buried her face in it, apparently inhaling its perfume.

"Still sealed, and for what reason?" she inquired after a momentary pause on the part of the chamberlain. "Is not his brother sole heir?"

Herr von Wismar shrugged his shoulders. He assured her he knew nothing more about the matter. Those were things of the past, and the name of Claudius had never since been mentioned at court till the late discovery of antiquities by Herr von Sassen in the merchant's house had brought it up again here and there.

"The seals are to remain on the doors to all eternity," I said softly. I remembered my discoveries well and what I had heard, and I felt ashamed of myself; still, for all that I did not intend the princess to remain without any information on the subject. "The deceased wished it so, and Herr Claudius therefore never allows one of the seals to be touched. He is strict, oh, terribly strict."

"Aha! That sounds almost as if you were yourself afraid of him, my little lady."

"I afraid of him? No, no, not I," I protested angrily. "I am not afraid now, not in the very least; but I cannot bear him," came out involuntarily. "Oh, that man cares for nobody, nobody in the whole world; that is an understood thing," I said briskly. "There are only two things he cares about—work, Charlotte says, and his great account-book. Flowers, an inexhaustible wealth of flowers are his; he could bury himself and his ugly house in the Mauerstrasse in them; but in the room he works in, where he labors from morning till night, he never allows even a green leaf near him. Watch in hand, he scolds his people if they are a moment late entering that abominable nest, and at night he gazes at the stars in the sky, because he can count them like the thalers on his table. He is miserly and never relieves any poor person——"

"Stop, my child," said the princess. "I must contradict you there. The poor of this town have no better friend, though his charity may be conducted in a manner peculiar to himself, and his signature may consequently be often absent from collection and subscription lists."

I paused a moment in surprise.

"But he is hard and cold," I resumed, "cold as an iceberg to—to Charlotte," I burst out, "and he pretends to know everything better than any one else."

"A nice list of iniquities," laughed the chamberlain.

"But the man showed lately that he really does understand some things better than other people," he added. "Our knowing Count Zell has, to the infinite satisfaction of everybody, been nicely duped at last. His Darling, which he brought back on his last journey, was a splendid specimen of beauty and elegance, but a tricky beast. Many maintain that he has been a circus horse, so singular are his habits. Zell was dying to get rid of him, but in our circle there was of course no one who would bite; but out of consideration for Zell every one was discreet, so as not to prevent others from coming forward, and young Lieutenant Claudius was all on fire about him. Several intimate friends of Zell's had made up a plausible story about the acquisition he would be, but his uncle saw Darling and refused to purchase—fortunately for the young man; for before another hour the beast had thrown Banker Tressel's son, who had bought it and is a very fair horseman; and the animal has also kicked him very badly."

"I must say, Herr von Wismar, that this 'discretion' in your circle, as you call it, is very offensive to me; and Count Zell may take care how he makes his next appearance at court." So said the princess, her large eyes glittering with indignation. "Is the fall likely to have bad consequences?"

"I scarcely think so," stammered the chamberlain. "But your highness may be quite at ease and remember who the horseman was," he added, coughing slightly and smiling at the same time. "That is robust blood and quite different flesh and blood, not easily injured. A few scratches and blue bruises will end the matter."

"You were speaking previously of a Charlotte in Claudius' house," said Herr von Wismar, turning to me, and feeling no doubt that he had gone a little too far. "Is that the imposing, handsome young girl?"

"Yes. Isn't Charlotte handsome?" I interrupted him delightedly. I at once forgave him all his childish folly for the sake of this one portrait he had drawn.

"Too colossal for my taste and too much of the emancipated young lady. I have met her occasionally at the 'female society,'" said the princess, more to the chamberlain. The meaning of "emancipated" was altogether unknown to me, but I heard that there was disapprobation in the lady's tone, and it pained and wounded me deeply.

"A singular kind of relationship it is to have in a house, How did Claudius come to adopt the children of a Frenchman?"

Herr von Wismar raised his shoulders, evidently unable to throw any light on the subject.

"And those we are speaking of are anything but grateful for this same adoption," said Fräulein von Wildenspring. "This Charlotte always angrily resists taking the name of Claudius. Méricourt was on her school-books, and her school-fellows were often mischievous enough to call her by her detested name instead, just to see how her sparkling eyes looked."

"Oh, then you know the young girl pretty well, Constance?" inquired the princess.

"As far as school-fellows of a different station happen to mix with each other, your highness," replied the young court lady, shrugging her shoulders with indifference. "We spent two years in the self-same school in Dresden. On her arrival here she sought to renew our obligatory acquaintance and paid me a visit."

"Well?" said the princess as the young lady hesitated for a moment.

"Papa was entirely opposed to any such intercourse between us, so I merely called there and left a card."

She paused suddenly, turned round, and made a deep and very graceful bow. A handsome young man, with a very grave face, entered the room by a side door, in company with my father and several other gentlemen. It was the duke.

The princess received him with all the affection of a mother, then presented me to him. I needed no great increase of courage to enable me to look up at his serene highness and to reply to the friendly questions he asked me. I had rapidly become at my ease, and the daisy was able to raise her head confidently over a great deal. My father looked at me in amazement and suddenly stroked my hair caressingly with his hand.

His face was greatly flushed again. I looked at the gold medals, several of which the prince was showing to his aunt, with absolute hatred. He told her that this acquisition had cost him a considerable sum, but that it would make the already far-famed medallion cabinet of the court of K. one of the most perfect in the world; for by the

purchase of this day he had acquired specimens which, to many a connoisseur in such matters, would seem almost as fabulous as the fairy-tales.

I saw the nervous twitching which convulsed my father's face almost incessantly, and I pitied him inexpressibly. I could easily picture to myself the agony it must have caused him to see these ardently coveted treasures passing from hand to hand as the lawful property of another amid universal admiration; and bitterness against him who, with his shop wisdom, had been the cause of this renunciation, made my whole soul rise in rebellion and caused me entirely to forget all reserve.

"Look here," I said in a low voice to the princess, who was just inspecting the imperial medal with delight. "Herr Claudius pretended to know better about that too. He maintained that that medal there was not real."

The duke turned round and fixed his piercing glance, to my terror, half in surprise, half in anger, on my face.

My father, however, laughed and again stroked my hair back from my forehead with his hand.

"Just look at this little diplomat!" he exclaimed. "It is fortunate papa is safe in the saddle, or this cunning little chatterbox might make trouble for him. Ridiculous!" he added, shrugging his shoulders and addressing Herr von Wismar, the only person who tried to assume the air of a skeptic, although the old dotard knew no more about the matter than the man in the moon. "Ridiculous! The fellow understands about as much of numismatics as I do of his tulip-raising, but for your satisfaction I will just mention that the disposer of these medals left K. to-day with several letters of recommendation from me in his pocket. He is about to visit the various courts and universities under the ægis of my name. Is this a sufficient guarantee to you for the new acquisitions made by his highness on my authority?"

Herr von Wismar smiled with an embarrassed air and assured my father that the faintest doubt never crossed his mind.

A regular storm now arose among those present against dilettantism, and none expressed greater disgust than Fräulein von Wildenspring, who, with an air of the utmost confidence, had interspersed the conversation with scraps of learning.

"The dilettanti are and have always been the plague of the professional man," said my father. "Up to this I must confess I have had nothing to say against the elder Claudius. He is intensely reserved, purposely avoids meeting me in his own house or grounds, and lets me do according to my pleasure with his art treasures; on the other hand, my so-called 'familiar' often wearies my very life out."

"Oh, the dandy lieutenant?" laughed one of the gentlemen.

"He sips knowledge as the butterfly the flower-blossom," continued my father with an affirmatory nod of his head. "If one but makes the most distant approach to a call on his reflective powers he's put off on the spot! To him the present predilection for antiquities which has been made the fashion by the court has just the same meaning as those incessantly changing follies of fashion that make him use a gilded saddle to-day, a beetle *breloque* to-morrow. He accompanied his uncle a short time ago on a business journey to the north. At his earnest request I gave him a letter of introduction to Professor Hart in Hanover, who in consequence was kind enough to accompany them to a group of Hun's graves in the haide and have one opened. Oh, how the discoveries they made looked when the young lieutenant brought them to me. Bent and broken to pieces, 'because,' as he excused himself, 'he had put them in one and the same chest with some minerals which Professor Hart had given him at the same time for a college friend!' My heart really grew sick within me."

Little did my father suspect that at that moment my heart had also grown sick within me—that I felt an indescribable ill-will toward those I was sitting among. They laughed and jeered and nobody ever thought of taking the part of the absent. The princess had at once excused Herr Claudius when I had gone too far in my accusations—even Herr von Wismar had spoken in his favor; but for Charlotte and Dagobert there was not one friendly word—the poor things!

The princess suddenly interrupted the general conversation by a question addressed to my father as to when the arrangement of the antiquities in the Carolinenlust would be finished. She felt much interested in the art

treasures which had been brought to light, and intended to accompany the duke on his first visit.

"I have another idea at the same time," she said. "I have a strong desire to see the Claudius establishment for once. Its conservatories are far-famed, but I have always hesitated to go there direct, for the owner's burgher pride is quite intolerable. On that account I fear it may be difficult to see the grounds."

"And then remember, too, your highness, the decidedly pietistic tone which the establishment has assumed for some time past and which is so repugnant to your highness," added Fräulein von Wildenspring energetically. One could see that the princess' intention of visiting the house was odious to her.

"On that very account I am making an excuse of the art-treasure exhibition. I can see the garden in passing through, and do not need to take either the pride of the owner or yet his pietistical tendencies into account."

The young court lady handed her patroness a cup of tea in silence and then resumed her work with apparent submission. The remainder of the evening was occupied in a lively discussion on ancient art, and the court gentlemen, who had so ruthlessly censured dilettantism, joined in it with as much confidence and enthusiasm as though they had all been individually as celebrated men as my father, and as though the study of archæology was the one and only subject on which their time and energy had been centered. I had believed in them fully had it not been for the sarcastic glances exchanged so frequently between the duke and my father.

As we were leaving, the princess sent for a silk handkerchief and tied it round my throat. She said it had grown cold, and her dear little haide lark must not grow hoarse. She assured my father that she would very often have me with her and take me specially under her protection. She then kissed me on the forehead and we left the castle.

XXI.

IN the mean time a violent storm had passed over the town. The cool air played around my temples and the wet pebbles on the castle walks sparkled and glittered in the gaslight. One of the court carriages took us home. It thundered into Claudius' yard, and a sensation of childish vanity made my heart swell with pride as I sprang out on the pavement past the duke's footman and entered a door, now opened to me with the utmost submission, but which but a few days previously had been almost closed against me. My eye sought Charlotte's room. I should like to have been seen from thence, but the whole front house was in darkness, with the exception of the staircase window. A splendid old-fashioned bell lamp hung above in the center of the hall, and illuminated such of the enormous arches of gray stone as were in closest proximity, which during the day-time seemed always an impossibility.

One of the magnificent conservatories, which the princess had spoken of that very evening, was brilliantly lighted up. Two large lamps hung suspended within and shed a purple light upon the night around. As we were walking up the center path I heard rapid steps coming from the conservatory, something light fluttered through the bushes, and all at once Charlotte stood before us.

"I heard you coming," she said in a suppressed voice and breathing hurriedly. "Pray leave the princess with me another half-hour, Herr von Sassen—the night is so lovely. I will bring her to you to the Carolinenlust quite safely."

My father bade me good-night and promised to acquaint Ilse with my protracted stay. He left us, and Charlotte threw her arm round my shoulder and drew me to her.

"There is nothing else for it, little one; you must be something of a lightning conductor," she said half-aloud and hastily to me. "Over there," and she pointed toward the greenhouse, "two hard heads are falling out with each other. Uncle Eric so seldom spends an evening with us that Eckhof has gradually accustomed himself to play first fiddle at our tea-table. This evening, to our extreme amazement, uncle presided there himself; but we had scarcely taken refuge in the conservatory from the first

heavy drops of rain before Eckhof, with the most inconceivable folly and want of tact, began to reproach my uncle most bitterly for having invited Helldorf to dinner to-day. He has raised a wasp's nest about his own ears!"

She paused and stood a moment listening. Eckhof's harsh voice was heard holding forth.

"It can't hurt the old man, indeed, to have his mummeries in the business and in the house put some stop to," she said, and one could hear the anger in her voice. "He has become too confident and carries the thing too far, that is quite true; only it must not come before Uncle Eric's judgment-seat. He murders the old man with his relentless eyes, his coldness and calm, which give the keenness of a knife to every word he utters." She moved forward somewhat quieter. "God knows what has so suddenly given rise to this dispute. For years together Uncle Eric has gone about to all appearances blind to this influence in the house. Eckhof has always been careful to avoid exhibiting his peculiarities exactly before him, but in this hour of intense excitement he is unable to control his tongue, and a very stream of his jargon is issuing from his lips—it is really intolerable! It is repulsive to me to the last degree to listen to such stuff from a man's mouth. On the other hand, I owe the old man many thanks. He always stands up for Dagobert and me, and that makes it my duty to cut his punishment as short as possible. Come along: your appearance will put an end to the whole scene."

The nearer I came to the conservatory—it was not the one Darling had ruined—the more I felt as if in a dream. I no longer heard what Charlotte was whispering, but allowed her to lead me mechanically along. The hot-house lay far to one side of the middle walk, and till now I had never approached it nearer; I had merely seen the glitter of its enormous panes in the distance. Botany and geography were both, as a matter of course, unknown worlds to me then, and I had no idea that the extraordinary structure yonder was quite a spot of tropical life imprisoned in glass and set down in the midst of German vegetation. I had but two words for it—marvel and effect.

But neither tubs nor flower-pots were to be seen there as in the other hot-house. In the very center, and from

the ground itself, rose stately palm trees, so high that they seemed nigh to bursting through the protecting glass. Water gushed over rocky brown masses; its spray dashed against the crags in sparkling drops and made the exquisitely pinnated feathery fronds of the ferns, which grew around in luxuriant beauty, tremble incessantly. Cactuses grew upon the stones, with their strange, fat, helpless-looking forms; but long purple bells hung down from their green flesh; and within, even in the distant dusky twilight, the wonderfully cut and twisted plants shed a yellow golden hue around like pale scattered light reflectors.

I looked up at Charlotte, fancying she must be influenced by the same charm and would wander on like the inexperienced morsel of humanity at her side. I never remembered that all this formed a part of that "shop" which she and Dagobert so determinedly hated and despised. Her glittering eye was fixed on one spot—Herr Claudius' face.

He was standing near a palm tree, in the full light of a lamp, and looked as tall and straight as its elegantly proportioned stem. It was not true—there was no killing coldness in his relentless eyes at that moment. He had a slight color and his face was animated from inward excitement, though his arms tightly folded over his breast gave him an appearance of calm and immovability.

The tea-table, which had been hastily pushed in, looked strange enough amid such surroundings. Dagobert was sitting on the edge of it. He was still in uniform, and the glitter and brilliancy on his breast and shoulders produced a very different effect amid the gorgeous coloring of the tropical bloom to that which his uncle's unadorned form did. With his back turned to Herr Claudius and in evident embarrassment he sat balancing a tea-spoon on his forefinger, looking just as if he had been involuntarily obliged to bend beneath a passing tempest. He seemed to have kept aloof as entirely from the unpleasant discussion as Fräulein Fliedner, who was knitting as rapidly as though some institution for destitute children stood in immediate need of new stockings for its every inmate.

"All that is quite ineffectual with me, Herr Eckhof," said Herr Claudius to the bookkeeper, who stood, his hands resting on the back of a chair, at some distance

from his chief, but his head all the same thrown back with an air of pride. He had just that moment been speaking in his telling voice, in that emphatic and marked manner which must perforce hit home. "Blasphemers, unbelievers, infidels—these favorite epithets of your party must not be under-estimated in their effect," continued Herr Claudius. "It is by their means you accomplish the well-nigh incredible fact that in the nineteenth century a large party of more enlightened people submit to a handful of narrow-minded fanatics, at least in outward seeming. Many, even people of intellect, are influenced to a certain extent and stand in awe of these anathemas, and so remain silent contrary to their better judgment; and this supports your party still as on a judgment-seat, though resting indeed on feet of potter's clay."

The chair shook and swayed beneath the bookkeeper's hands, but Herr Claudius did not allow the sound to disturb him.

"I honor Christianity—understand me aright—not the Church," he continued, "and I have consequently carried out and held fast all the directions of my predecessors, coinciding as they do with my own firm convictions; and in accordance with their pious intentions all employed in the Firma Claudius shall be piously educated—but I will never allow my house to be made a nest in which to hatch religious errors. A mercantile house that has its correspondents in every quarter of the globe, the business relations of which extend to Turkey, China, and the whole world, and that black orthodoxy, that infallibility of faith, confines it like a snail in its shell—there cannot be a more absurd union! How awfully must our young commercial travelers, whom you take such pains to bring up in the orthodox faith, play the hypocrite when they come into friendly intercourse with those whom you have taught them to consider as despised and cast off by the Almighty. No, I cannot forgive myself for having allowed such a gloomy spirit to run riot here, that my people have been compelled to bear——"

"I have not compelled any one," interrupted the bookkeeper.

"Certainly not with the knout in your hand, Herr Eckhof, but as far as your position here allowed. I know, for instance, that our junior clerk, whose salary is but

moderate and who is obliged out of it to support a widowed mother—I know that he has been obliged to subscribe to your mission box far beyond his means; a thing of the existence of which I had not the remotest idea. Our work-people all, without exception, permit you to deduct a certain sum weekly from them for this same mission box, because, in fact, they dare not do otherwise, thinking you can do anything with me and might injure them. Do you never consider, then, how dearly these people have to pay for their faith without this addition? Their baptism, the celebration of their marriages, the communion service, even their departure out of this world—the Church demands a tithe of their labor for all these. Therefore away with the mission box out of my house, away with all the rubbish I found in the work-room drawers yesterday, which ruin our noble language with their silly, childish nonsense and recall views belonging entirely to the unenlightened Middle Ages.”

These crushing remarks were all made in anything but a loud voice or passionate tone, and the color scarcely deepened on his cheek as he occasionally stretched his hand out indignantly toward his bookkeeper.

Charlotte stood riveted to the spot. She appeared to have forgotten that she had sought me out on purpose to put an end to the affair.

“He speaks well,” she said. “I wouldn’t have given him credit for it—he is generally so abrupt and indolent about speaking. Really, Eckhof is going to play the idiot and throw down the gauntlet again. He will get another cuff,” she exclaimed angrily and fixing her glowing eyes upon the bookkeeper as if she would fain have pierced through the glass.

He had left the spot he had hitherto occupied and had advanced a few steps nearer to Herr Claudius.

“Despise the ‘childish nonsense’ if you will, Herr Claudius,” he said—his pleasing voice could assume a tone of cutting sharpness. “It refreshes and strengthens me and many other really Christian people. The Almighty wills that we should walk in simplicity, childish simplicity, here below, and therefore we shall find pardon in his eyes more readily than if we made the works of the immortal Schiller and Goethe our study, who, of course, do

not destroy our noble language. If you do not like my honest endeavor to serve my Lord and Master, if you will not allow it in your house, of course I must submit in all humility; only I fancied it could not injure the house in the Mauerstrasse if a great deal of prayer were offered up in it. A great deal has occurred in it which cries to the Almighty and must be atoned for."

"You have made me this indirect reproach already twice within the last few days," said Herr Claudius quietly. "I respect your age and your service in the house, and on that account will do no more than refer to a mode of acting which does not despise raking up old sores and endeavoring by their influence to prop up a power which is on the wane. I leave it to your own decision if such a method is noble. What I may have committed in my youthful folly and passion I take upon my own shoulders. Unfortunately I have added yet another wrong course to it, in that I have, partly in the wish to atone for that son's absence, permitted you to go about the house and concerns quite unrestrainedly and to do pretty much what you would even with myself. It would be a crying sin were I to allow all the people who are dependent on me to suffer for my offense even one day longer. I will not have, I do not wish for your prayers, which are only enforced and perfectly without effect."

"What did he do?" I whispered to Charlotte.

"He shot Eckhof's only son."

I tore myself away from her in horror and with difficulty suppressed a scream.

"For pity's sake don't be so childish," said Charlotte impatiently, drawing me at the same time with one powerful movement once more within her reach. "It was an honorable duel in which Eckhof's son fell, and beyond a doubt the most interesting moment in Uncle Eric's whole bürgerlich life. But let us go in. Matters have reached a climax."

Without more ado she walked along in front of the glass inclosure with me and pushed me in at the side door. I stepped on fine gravel. Serpentine walks wound through shady thickets, which were overshadowed in their turn by rockeries interspersed with the finest velvet sward. The thinner this lattice-work of leaves and branches became the more nervous I felt. I certainly did

not stand in such a position toward the owner of the house as to warrant my intruding at these unseasonable hours during discussions never intended to meet my ear. What if the master of the house were to be really angry? I know not how it was, but all at once I felt myself unable any longer to think so lightly, "Oh, it is only Herr Claudius!" I trembled before him.

Charlotte had thrown her arm round me, and as I endeavored with the first impulse to make my escape, I felt my waist unmercifully squeezed. I was impelled forward as if the wind were blowing me on, and all at once we stood in the midst of the astonished company as though we had fallen from the sky.

"I picked the princess up in the garden," said Charlotte rapidly and cutting short a sentence just about to issue from the bookkeeper's lips. "Dear Miss Fliedner, just look at the child. Does she not look quite another person? She has been at the court tea and has driven home in the court carriage just like Cinderella! Let us see, child, if one of your little satin slippers hasn't been left on the castle steps!"

Notwithstanding my embarrassment I could not help laughing, and I accepted the chair which Dagobert brought me. Charlotte was right: the dispute was cut short, concluded, as if it had never taken place; and when I looked up I caught sight of the bookkeeper disappearing by the very path we had come. Herr Claudius was still standing near the palm tree. With what shy curiosity did my eye scan him! Had he not the brand on his forehead? He had killed a man! I only saw the grave blue eyes looking down at me, and I shrank back timidly.

Fräulein Fliedner began to breathe freely once more. My arrival was evidently agreeable to her and she pressed my hand tenderly.

"Tell us all about it, little one," she said as she took off my hat and pulled out the crushed trimmings of my sleeves. "What was it like at the court?"

I buried myself deep down in the cane chair. One of the gigantic fern leaves, looking emerald-like by the lamplight, waved over my head, and others again hung sideways across and fanned my bare shoulders soft and cool. There I sat, under the shelter of a protecting canopy as it were, and I felt securely concealed. In

addition Herr Claudius drew back, but he did not leave the conservatory. One could hear him softly pacing up and down behind the groups of rocks and plants.

My courage rose once more and I described my glorious *début*, at first with some hesitation, but gradually, as I became myself amused, quite fluently—how my so arduously prepared reverence had come to naught; and of my childish song and the scrap of my history which I had related to the princess with so much trustful simplicity!

Charlotte interrupted me every now and then with a burst of laughter, and Fräulein Fliedner could not forbear joining in it too occasionally while she patted my cheek kindly. Dagobert alone did not join in the laugh. He looked at me with the very same expression of alarm as the gray-eyed young lady at court, and when, in conclusion, I took off the shawl, because I felt it too warm, and threw it on the table, saying it belonged to the princess, he took it up with the most indescribable respect and hung it carefully on the back of his chair, which annoyed and irritated me beyond measure.

"Stop," cried Charlotte suddenly, stretching her hand out toward me as I was proceeding in my description. "Just look, Fräulein Fliedner, and say yourself if the princess, despite her dark-blue eyes, is not far more like one of those interesting daughters of Israel, such as the Bible represents, than a shoot of an old and thoroughly German stock. There! as the luxuriantly curling hair stands out against the fern tree—pray, princess, keep your hand a moment longer thus above your forehead—she recalls the picture of Paul Delaroche's young Jewess vividly to my mind as on the banks of the Nile she watches in secret the fate of the little Moses."

"My grandmother was a Jewess," I said, without the least embarrassment.

The measured tread in the background of the conservatory suddenly ceased, and a death-like silence reigned one moment at the tea-table where I was sitting, so that I could overlook a part of the garden through the glass. The moon had risen, but was still hidden beneath a bank of clouds whose jagged edges were silvered by its light. The broad plain was flooded by a pale flickering light, which gave a spectral and distorted appearance to the objects around. The bed of white lilies, though distant

and partially hidden by the trees overhanging the stream, appeared notwithstanding to be the one spot which absorbed all the scanty moonshine. It shone brightly opposite to me and made me think, with pain and anguish once again, of my poor grandmother as she lay stretched beneath the oak. The whole scene as it occurred and all I had suffered through that fearful night arose before me. The few and ever-touching points of interest which had taken place between the mentally diseased lady and myself during those long years, then the sudden awakening of grandmother's love in her dying hour, my misery when I perceived the approach of death was about to rob me of this newly discovered heart—all this rose with overpowering vividness before me; and as it rose, so I spoke out. I also touched upon the dreadful interview between my grandmother and the old clergyman—how she had rejected clerical aid and died in the Jewish faith, and how mild and forgiving the old pastor had been. Suddenly, while all were listening in the profoundest silence, quick, heavy steps were heard on the gravel, and the bookkeeper, whom I had fancied safe long ago in the Carolinenlust, stood before me.

"The man was an idiot!" he literally thundered forth. "He should not have left the bed till he had brought the apostate soul back again. He should have compelled her to return. Priests have means enough of rousing up the refractory even when they will tumble headlong into eternal death."

I sprang up. The idea that a voice such as this might disturb the death-struggle of some soul thus remorselessly and prolong the pangs of the departing excited me fearfully.

"Oh, he dared not have done that," I said. "We would not have suffered it, Ilse and I—most certainly not—and I won't suffer you now to speak another word about my poor dear grandmother."

Fräulein Fliedner had risen quickly and laid both her arms soothingly around me while she cast an anxious glance over toward the rocky groups. The steps were audible once more, this time approaching the tea-table rapidly.

"Did you tell the princess all that too, Fräulein von Sassen?" asked Dagobert quickly. He placed a barrier to further discussion by this question and succeeded in silencing the approaching footsteps.

I shook my head in silence.

"Well, then, if I may offer my advice, preserve the same silence in future."

"But for what reason?" inquired Fräulein Fliedner.

"You can readily imagine, dear Fliedner," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "It is well known that the duke does not look on Jews with too favorable an eye, because his former agent, Hirschfeld, swindled him to a fabulous extent and finished up by absconding. Further—and that is the principal thing—the name of von Sassen has been an unstained one for centuries at court. In his highness' eyes Herr von Sassen's learning is of course the main feature—but it is a different thing with other people. They doubtless are chiefly influenced by the age and purity of the family's descent. Such a disclosure on the young lady's part might have a baneful effect on the brilliant reception the doctor has received, as well upon her own, which she would doubtless regret."

I remained silent because I could not understand how my father's mother having been a Jewess could possibly injure him. I failed entirely in forming any idea of those worldly systems which were as yet wholly unknown to me. It was also far from a suitable moment to reflect on the subject. I was still trembling from the effects of the fright which the sudden and unexpected appearance of that dreaded old man had caused me. And there he was still, planted right opposite to me, with folded arms and his eyes glowing like coals beneath his white brows as if they would fain scorch me up. For the first time in my life I felt that I was hated—an experience so difficult for the young mind to grasp. The air I breathed in the neighborhood of my enemy seemed to stifle me; my stay in the conservatory became intolerable.

"I want to go home—Ilse is waiting for me," I said, disengaging myself by a sudden movement from Fräulein Fliedner's arms and seizing my hat, while my eyes roved with feverish longing over the cool large garden outside.

"Well, then, come," said Charlotte, rising. "I see in your glance we must not venture to detain you! You are just in a mood to smash the panes like the wild Darling."

"Darling threw his master to-day and kicked him," I said.

Dagobert started up.

"What! Arthur Tressel, the famous horseman? Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, bah, a splendid horseman that! The man would have done wiser to remain at his desk," said Charlotte, with evident indifference; but a glance of fury shot from beneath her eyelids, which were cast down in apparent contempt, and stole toward the background of the greenhouse. "Did the poor young man hurt himself?"

"Herr von Wismar told the princess that his was robust blood and quite a different kind of bones—they were not easily smashed."

A low laugh was heard from the rockery—and I believe the shock of an earthquake could not have produced a more startling effect upon the brother and sister than did my artless natural reply and that immediate though scarcely audible laugh. What had I, poor, terrified little creature—what could I have done that Dagobert looked so fiercely at me? In the first moment it seemed to be Charlotte's impulse to burst out with some violent exclamation in the direction of the rockery, but she conquered herself and remained silent, only throwing her head proudly back.

"Come, little one," she said. "Give Fräulein Fliedner your hand and say good-night—it is high time to take you to bed."

At any other time my seventeen-year-old dignity would have taken offense at this mode of treating me, but upon this occasion I forgave Charlotte on the spot; for the lips which thus compelled themselves to jest were white as snow. The proud girl was deeply wounded, that I saw, though all unconscious of the cause.

She walked beside me the length of the conservatory and the first part of the garden silently and to all appearance calm; but scarcely had we well crossed the bridge ere she paused, and taking a long, deep breath pressed her hands to her heart.

"Did you hear how he laughed?" she inquired, her wrath breaking forth.

"It was Herr Claudius?"

"Yes, child. When you have lived somewhat longer among us you will then learn that this great and superior mind never laughs, unless it may be at the weaknesses of mankind, as he did a few minutes ago. Little one, in

future you must be more careful how you chatter about everything that occurs at court when my uncle is with us."

I was disgusted. They had insisted on my relating everything, and I had in reality shown a great deal of prudence for a creature of my open, uncultivated nature. Not one word of all that had been said about Dagobert at court had crossed my lips.

"What are you scolding about, though?" I asked sullenly. "Am I not to say that they consider the fallen rider strong and powerful at court?"

"*O sancta simplicitas!*" exclaimed Charlotte, with a mocking laugh. "Arthur Tressel is tender and elegant—made of the finest porcelain. Herr von Wismar's spirited sketch referred entirely to the worthy body of the burgher class. A cavalier would doubtless have broken his exquisite and peculiarly constructed ribs in such a fall, and his noble soul have winged its way at once back to heaven; but the robust burgher blood possesses far too much of the coarse, low earthen element, and so plaster heals it and it is not much the worse!"

She laughed once again and proceeded with hasty steps toward the parterre of the Carolinenlust, I by her side.

The moon had now risen to the full and was shining down on the little castle. The pale light, falling on this silent oasis in the midst of the gloomy wood, produced the same intoxicating effect upon my nerves as the strong scent of the flowers had done in the front garden. The marble Diana yonder looked so appallingly life-like that one expected every moment to hear the arrow whiz through the air! The moonlight bathed the fruit and flower garlands and festoons upon the walls, lighted up the stony eyes, closed lips, and heavily burdened caryatids, and floated upon the mirror of the water and on the enormous glass window-panes. I could recognize every individual fold of the faded silk drapery behind the balcony door—the moon was gliding now with silvery beams within that secret chamber—but the lamp in that dreadful fanatic's room of course was not lighted.

"The man that lived there," said Charlotte, pointing to the *bel-étage*, "he would have understood my brother and me. He shook off the dust and dirt of the shop connection with a firm and decided hand and stepped boldly into

that sphere where alone he could breathe the life that suited him." She looked fixedly at the windows, and shrugging her shoulders continued: "He fell from that state, no doubt, with smashed brains—but what then? He had nevertheless compelled the haughty and exclusive 'caste' to recognize him. He had become their equal and trod with brilliancy and fame the path which they so jealously seek to keep exclusively their own. Moreover, it is all one whether this path extended over ten or fifty years. Willingly would I die early if only I could thereby attain a twelve months' sojourn in high society. I have tasted what it means to spend half one's youth among a set of haughty ambitious hearts, and to bear an imposed and plebeian name among school-fellows of the nobility who turn up their noses at one. I will not be always looked down on—I will not."

She shook her clenched hand upward and paced rapidly up and down, while her breathing seemed to grow faster and faster.

"Uncle Eric knows of this hidden fire within my breast. Dagobert thinks, feels, and suffers just as I do," she continued, pausing in her walk, "and with all the cit-like pride of his position he endeavors to suppress it, to stifle it. We ought to seek the foundation of our dignity in ourselves, and not in outward circumstances, says this great philosopher. Ridiculous! That first properly roused me. I feel as if bound to the martyr's stake. The bridle galls me and I curse the evil fate which brought the young eagles into the crow's nest. And whence these ungovernable feelings?" she demanded as she paced slowly on. "They have been there since I drew breath; they must be in the blood that flows through my veins. It is no chimera, that consciousness of aristocratic descent. Threads may be woven which connect one being with another, which unite us with past greatness, even when they are perceptible no more; as for instance in this case of ourselves, over whose real birth a profound silence, an impenetrable darkness hangs."

These passionately uttered complaints were suddenly put a stop to and ended in a kind of stammer, for there, at the entrance of one of the walks into the wood which we had just passed by, stood Herr Claudius, looking at the excited girl with grave, quiet eyes.

"This darkness shall be cleared up, Charlotte, I promise it to you," he said as quietly as though the violent outbreak had been directed specially at him and he was replying to it. "But you shall only hear the truth when you know how to bear it, when life and I"—here he pointed imperiously toward himself—"have made you more sensible. Now go back to the house and get Dörte to make you a glass of *eau sucrée*. One thing more: I most imperatively forbid you to take these moonlight walks in future with Fräulein von Sassen. The desire of 'greatness' is infectious. You understand me?"

Extraordinary to relate, this girl with the strong mind did not find a word of reply. Surprise must no doubt have paralyzed her for the moment and rendered her powerless. With head sullenly erect she pressed my hand so hard that I very nearly screamed aloud, then threw it violently from her and disappeared in the wood.

I was now alone with him. Fear and oppression seized my heart, but I would not let him see I was afraid—not now, at all events. Goliath, strong as he was, had lost his head for a moment and fled, but David, if of small stature, bore himself the braver. I walked for my taste far too slowly toward the Carolinenlust, and he kept beside me, silent. The hall was brilliantly illuminated; the corridor, too, which lay behind my room, was lighted up every evening by Herr Claudius' desire with two lamps. At the entrance to this corridor, a step of which I had already mounted, he stood still.

"You left me this afternoon in ill-humor," he said. "Give me your hand. I had rather not make such unpleasant experiences as Heinz with the wicked raven."

He stretched out his hand to me. Through the door of the corridor the lamplight, shining through a ruby-colored glass window, threw a red reflection on his long white fingers, and the diamond ring threw out the most dazzling rays. I shuddered.

"It is full of blood!" I cried horrified and knocking his hand away.

He drew back and looked at me. Never to my dying day shall I forget the glance that then met mine. Never yet had a human eye regarded me thus—never! He turned away and left the house without uttering one word.

Involuntarily I put my hand to my heart as though I

had been stabbed by a dagger. What pain I felt! It was remorse, deep remorse! I rushed down the stairs into the open air. I wished to give him the hand he had asked for and beg of him not to be angry. But the gravel walk was empty, and I did not even hear the sound of retreating footsteps. Herr Claudius must have gone by the soft woodpath.

Deeply cast down, I at last sought Ilse. Her ever-watchful and sharp eyes at once noticed the drops on my eyelashes, but I told her that that abominable blood-red glass in the corridor was the cause of it, and that it would have been far better if Darling had broken it instead of the greenhouse.

XXII.

THIS evening was succeeded by many days of an anxiety such as I experienced for the first time in my life—anxiety about a sick father. He suffered so frightfully from headache that for three whole days he was unable to go up to his beloved library. The wild bee which could never bear to pass one half-hour in the Dierkhof rooms during sunny weather now sat from early morning till late at night at the feet of the sufferer, listening anxiously to every movement and to every sound that came from his lips. The yearning for a sight of the August sky outside never once assailed me. Sunbeams, too, floated every now and then through the darkened chamber, and that was when I sat on the side of the bed and was permitted to lay one of my cool hands alternately on the invalid's burning forehead, when, faintly smiling, he would whisper to Ilse how little he had thought what a blessing it was to have a child. Since the death of my mother he had always felt on the recurrence of his old malady—he suffered periodically from these headaches—doubly desolate and ill, because there was no careful hand, no eye with tender forethought around him. He would now lament with tenfold regret the many years father and daughter had been separated as a great and irreparable loss.

The duke's private physician visited my father frequently. Every day a footman came twice to inquire after the state of the invalid and to bring him refresh-

ments. In fact, Ilse's hands were full, and she had more than enough to do to reply to the innumerable anxious inquiries which poured in from every quarter. In the front house, too, no little sympathy was shown. Fräulein Fliedner came herself every morning to make personal inquiries and put the whole house and its occupants at our disposal. Charlotte, too, came one evening to spend half an hour with me, to comfort "the little one" in her "anxiety," as she said. But it seemed to me as if she stood far more in need of external cheering than I did. Something dark and gloomy lay brooding over the heavy brows, and the hitherto proud and careless assurance of her bearing was now replaced by a fidgety nervousness. She never alluded to the meeting with her uncle in the wood by a single syllable, but, on the other hand, she gave me a lively description of the impending storm which threatened the front dwelling every moment. Herr Claudius was carrying out with a high hand his resolution of cleansing his house and business premises from the hypocrisy which had crept into it. He had magnanimously left the collections already made from the work-people toward the missionary box in the bookkeeper's hands, but had replaced an equal sum from his own means as a fund in a newly established money-box erected by him for the purpose of forwarding the erection of a *Real-schule** for the sons of the work-people and to lighten the expenses of the marriage portions for the daughters of the poor. The young clerk who, from a service of love, had subscribed to the mission box far beyond his means, had received a severe reprimand and a threat that any relapse into such hypocrisy would be followed by his dismissal. The bookkeeper was of course going about with a face of fixed and inexpressible ill-humor—that I knew already, for I had seen him several times, through a split in the blind, walking round the pond in company with the brother and sister. The bond between these three individuals appeared through these new circumstances to have been drawn still closer; the walks together in the wood testified to that.

As often as Charlotte mentioned Herr Claudius' name I felt a slight pang within me, but the torments of remorse

* Academy.

and self-reproach had considerably abated since I had repeatedly reminded myself of the irritating fact that the origin of my father's illness lay in the excitement from which he had suffered about the purchase of the medal. The admirable and sharp logic of my seventeen-year-old head laid the whole blame on the hard-hearted refuser of the one remedy, and so we were quits!

Now, however, the evil days were past. The windows of the sick-chamber stood wide open, air and sun streamed in again, and Ilse was dusting and scrubbing as if the whole sand of the desert had been poured out there. I had accompanied my father on his first visit to the library, boiled his coffee for the afternoon in the machine up there, drawn the green curtain partially, just as he liked it, and wrapped a wadded quilt round his limbs. I knew he had been well attended to and that he was calmly happy at being once more able to resume his labor. Now and then I flew away like an arrow from the bow. Now I began to value the delicious wood sward, the refreshing shade underneath the millions of interwoven boughs. The sun hung like a dazzling globe of fire over the garden. It looked just as if it longed to drink up all the blue water of the pond, which was lying dead and lazy within its stone circlet.

I turned into the path which I had not trodden since the previous Sunday and crept into the thicket. There stood Gretchen's little basket carriage, still filled with the half-crushed, half-decayed strawberries. Nobody had asked to get it back again; possibly the old gardener Schäfer had looked for it, but had been unable to find it. How sorry I felt for the poor child, who no doubt mourned over the lost toy. Her parents were poor, so poor that their mother's hands bore the signs of toil, and she was very probably unable to supply the loss.

Although Herr Claudius had not spoken a word of direction to me individually in the late scene, he had notwithstanding placed a perpetual bar to any repetition of such an offense—at least so I fancied—when he took out the key and put it in his pocket. Nevertheless I made at once for the garden door. Lo and behold, what did I see but a new lock before me! a strong, solid lock, without a key. The bolts and bars were also quite new. Dear me! what an amount of respect must they have for the power-

ful little hand that they had thus, as it were, set the gate anew in iron!

I clambered up the elm tree, but on this occasion it was no joke. I had what they termed my lace things upon my feet and had slipped my elegantly attired limbs into the old haide shoes. Oh, what a world too wide they were for me! Every moment they threatened to part company with me and to stay behind in the thicket.

At last, however, I sat perched on the very top of the elm. A child's little carriage stood on the balcony of the Swiss cottage, completely shaded by the wild vine (Virginian creeper). Little Hermann was lying in it on white cushions, very lazy, but also very content. Near him stood Gretchen munching a large piece of bread-and-butter, chattering between whiles to her little brother. In the room within I could see their mamma ironing and coming every now and then to the door with a flushed face to look after the children.

Who could have thought, looking at the soft womanly face before me, that such a storm as that I had seen pass over it on Sunday last was possible? At this moment there remained as little trace of it in the smiling features as there appeared any complaint on Gretchen's part over her lost carriage. But I was determined the child should have it again without further delay. I intended to fill it with fresh strawberries and flowers and to beg the old gardener to carry it back. I left the top of the tree and began to swing myself down from one bough to another, when I heard people all at once approaching from the Carolinenlust. They must have been very near me already, for I shrank back in terror at the sound of the old bookkeeper's voice, which sounded to me as if he were standing already at the foot of the elm tree. I did not again reach the top of the tree without some considerable noise from my heavy incumbrances, but I clasped the trunk with my arms and sat perfectly still, hoping that the storm would blow over quickly, for I was sitting on a very slender bough, and listened with a beating heart to what passed below.

The first thing I saw through the leafy canopy was Charlotte's purple velvet bow, which she generally wore in her hair, and where Charlotte was, there of course was Dagobert. The brother and sister had fled once more from the

sultry and storm-threatening atmosphere of the house. They were miserable and needed comforting, but it affected me painfully all the same to see that they turned to this disagreeable old man in their necessity.

The wanderers turned into a path close to my place of concealment. Eckhof lowered his voice perceptibly, but his fine, clear intonation enabled me notwithstanding to catch quite distinctly every word he uttered. He held his hat in his hand. The snow-white partition of his hair shone clearly, but his appearance otherwise indicated an unwonted gloom. The grim and embittered expression of countenance showed innumerable folds and wrinkles in the usually smooth, one might almost say conceitedly tended face.

"For heaven's sake, hold your tongue with your consolations," he exclaimed, standing still, but not very politely. "The consequences cannot be calculated! Neither of you can be judges of it, since neither of you know what an immense step it was to gain over the house of Claudius with its many dependents to our ranks. That had produced an immense effect and brought back many a weak one and many a waverer into the Church once more. And now the edifice raised with so much toil is all at once and with such *éclat*, such mercilessness, thrown to the ground."

"Uncle is cutting off his nose to spite his face," said Dagobert coldly. "The powerful and wealthy have no better ally and protection than the Church against the multitude of those who make a stand against them. Did I but possess wealth and power, your party would be the richer by one, at all events, and that an earnest partisan. I understand the times and belong to those who steadfastly oppose the giddy whirl which they call progress."

"With regard to the Church, Fräulein Charlotte holds quite different opinions from yours," said Eckhof, his fiery eye resting piercingly on the young girl's face.

"Yes, our views differ widely on that point," she replied candidly. "If I possessed money I should look upon it solely in the light of its supplying me with the means of solving the disgraceful and depressing mystery which hangs over our family's past history. I do not want to eat the crumbs which are thrown to me any longer, because I feel and know distinctly that it is unworthy of me, that

in future days I shall probably feel ashamed of having done so. From this time forward I will scrape and save."

"Fräulein Charlotte save?" broke in Eckhof with sarcastic incredulity.

"I tell you," she continued vehemently, "I would go about in sackcloth and ashes only to obtain sufficient means to make a journey of inquiry to Paris."

"And what if it were unnecessary to go so far to solve the mystery?"

Every one of these words fell heavily like sounding brass in my ears and on my nerves. The man that uttered them with such weight and solemnity stood there as if he had with one single decisive step forever freed himself from a heavy inward struggle. "Come with me," said he abruptly and imperiously to the young lady, who followed him mechanically and in silence. He seated himself on the bench where I had sat and sung the previous Sunday, and which was situated in a slanting direction opposite to my present hiding-place.

Oh misery, what a dreadful position I had got into! In mortal terror I still clung to the elm's trunk, but half-swinging in the air. I was afraid my weight might break the fragile bough on which I rested, and in addition to this my unfortunate shoes seemed to find a pleasure in gradually, but none the less inevitably, slipping off my feet, which were helping to support me on the tree. The consequences would have been frightful. Think, if such a monster had suddenly tumbled down, what an occasion for Dagobert, and what a splendid opportunity for my enemy to deliver to me an overwhelmingly severe lecture!

"I am going to relate a history to you," said the book-keeper to the brother and sister, who had sat down beside him. "But first listen to a plain explanation. What you are now about to learn does not proceed from any attachment to you on my part—it would be a lie were I to say so. Nor am I speaking from motives of revenge; but at this particular moment you must look upon me not as the individual Eckhof, but as a soldier to whom no choice is left—when he must make one between men's earthly interests, were it even those of his own family, of his own flesh and blood, and the good of the Church."

And it was this blind fanaticism which actually and truly inspired Eckhof; he was in the deepest earnest in

what he said. One could not fail to observe it in the glitter of his eyes as he raised them for a moment, seeking the light of heaven through the leafy canopy that shrouded him.

"You have repeatedly assured me," he said to Dagobert, "that once in possession of wealth and a distinguished name you would immediately join our party."

"I repeat it solemnly again, I could not put either under better protection. Thousands would not seem to me too much."

Eckhof nodded his head.

"It will be looked upon as some atonement for the many sins that were committed in secret, and the chastisement will at last be removed from those unhappy souls who have hitherto been doomed to wander about without rest," he said pathetically. "These evils all arose, properly speaking, from a merchant's son having despised that station of life where God had placed him and chosen instead the military profession. He was a very fine-looking young man and understood all those arts which attract mankind, so the duke ennobled him and kept him continually at his side. A dissolute life was that which they led over there in those days, though it is from thence that purity, uprightness, and the fear of God ought to flow forth over all the land. The duke was of a joyous disposition, and so was the duchess his wife, as well as his youthful sisters, the Princesses Sidonie and Margaret, who were not unlike the daughters of Herod. They had their own way to a great extent, for the duke loved them dearly; and they might have asked him for anything save only his consent to a *mésalliance*, for he was proud of his princely blood. The two beautiful sisters traveled here and there just as they pleased. Princess Margaret resided more at the court at L. than at home, but her elder sister had a strong predilection in favor of Paris and Switzerland. She often went away for two and even three months at a time, observing of course the strictest incognito, and under the care of an old and highly respectable lady in waiting and a cavalier equally advanced in years. 'The good people are long since dead.'"

Here he paused a moment and stroked his chin, while I sat poised upon the bough in utter despair. The soles of my feet were cramped together in order to keep my

shoes from falling off, and my temples were beating violently with the efforts I made, for I did not even venture to take a long breath. And this man's narrative promised to be so extended I could see no prospect of an end. At last he began again:

"It was a very singular circumstance, however, that whenever the Princess Sidonie went to Switzerland another very beautiful young lady was sure to make her appearance in the Carolinenlust. She had precisely the same black curls, precisely the same slight form, and was altogether her very image. On these occasions the bridge leading to the front garden was locked even more closely than usual, if possible, and along the bank of the river on the side next the Carolinenlust a strong paling was erected, which after Lothar's death was, of course, allowed to fall into decay. But one person enjoyed the honor of passing from the front residence over the bridge without restriction back and forward, and that was Fräulein Fliedner. She had actually a key of her own, which she generally used in the evenings or even late at night for this purpose. If you ask me how I come to know all this, I can only tell you that my late wife related it to me. She never, indeed, had any share in these dark doings—to her honor be it said—but female ears and eyes are keen and quick, and when female curiosity is once excited women think little of wet feet, but are sure to find a spot in the river where they can slip through."

"Aha, the good lady listened too," thought I, to my great satisfaction, and forgetting for a moment the danger of my position.

"That was a life such as turtle-doves lead. A magnificent voice used to sing the most beautiful songs, and late in the quiet night the young officer's epaulettes could be seen gleaming and glittering in the moonlight on the meadow yonder, while the fair slight lady hung upon his arm. Once, however, Fräulein Fliedner hurried over the bridge without any apparent caution. Lights were seen glancing to and fro in the windows of the Carolinenlust and at midnight an infant's cry was heard."

Charlotte jumped up with open mouth, as though she were gasping for breath. Her sparkling eyes were fixed devouringly on the narrator's face.

"For several years successively the lady's presence at

the Carolinenlust was noticed. The scene I have just described was repeated once more at a later date," said Eckhof, continuing, "and then the gay, light-minded Princess Sidonie died suddenly of apoplexy at one of the baths, and the handsome Lothar, who was just then with the duke at Vienna, three days later sent a bullet through his own head. Herr Claudius came here some days after the dreadful catastrophe; he had visited Vienna on his way and had met Lothar there. The two brothers, who had met so seldom, were much drawn to each other on this occasion—that I have from Eric's own lips. The first time I was permitted to go in to speak to him I could not forbear from touching on the occurrences which had taken place at the Carolinenlust. He looked haughtily and displeased at me, and said, pointing to Lothar's pocket-book, 'My brother lived in honorable matrimony with his wife; the certificates are there.' Days after he had legal men there in compliance with the wishes of the deceased. I stood outside in the corridor with them while he once more went round the rooms where his brother had lived. I saw him lay the pocket-book into a writing-table drawer and lock it. Then he made the rounds of all the rooms yet again, which we were not allowed to enter. He shook the windows, closed the doors, and three minutes afterward the legal seals were on them. The two children born in the Carolinenlust were——"

"Quiet! quiet—not another word! Don't say it!" said Charlotte, springing up. "Don't you know I shall go mad, that I must die if this—were I to believe this wondrous story, even if only for one hour long, and then must afterward say to myself, 'It is not true, it was but the silly imagination of a woman long dead?'"

She pressed her hands to her temples and paced up and down.

"Calm yourself and keep your head," warned Eckhof, rising and seizing hold of the young girl's arm. "I only ask you one question: if not the children of Lothar and the Princess Sidonie, whose children then are you?"

Dear me! Charlotte the daughter of a princess! I was within an ace of falling from my perch. Now all was right—all. How unmistakably had the princely blood in their veins made itself felt! I could have shouted for joy if it hadn't been for the frightful torture of my feet and

that I felt the necessity of saving up the remainder of my strength to enable me to keep quite quiet. What would have become of me if the grim old man had discovered me now, after his confessions, on my involuntary perch as a listener?

"How should it have occurred to Herr Claudius," he continued, "to educate and even adopt the children of utter strangers and of another nation too? You see, your lawful property, the inheritance of his brother, he does not deprive you of—he is too just for that. He goes even further: by not marrying he secures you his own fortune also. He will take care that your pecuniary circumstances are brilliant, though perhaps not till after his death: until then he will keep you in leading-strings. But your real name he will withhold from you forever, because he does not wish the new sprig of nobility to continue. I know him well; he has the same unbending pride of all the Claudius family. But calm yourself now for the present," said Eckhof impatiently, "and collect your earliest recollections."

"I remember nothing—nothing," stammered Charlotte, putting her hand to her forehead. The girl's strong mind gave way beneath the weight of joy.

"Charlotte, collect yourself," exclaimed Dagobert, too. Outwardly he seemed far more tranquil than his sister, but he seemed to me suddenly taller, so proudly did he hold himself, and in his dark flushed face lay an expression which intimidated me. "Her recollections must in any case be very scant," he said to the bookkeeper, "for she was very little when our mode of life changed; indeed, I know very little more myself. We did not spend our infancy in Paris itself, but in a small place in the vicinity of the town, with Madam Godin—you know that already. I remember that my father used to let me ride on his knee, but for my life I cannot recall what he looked like. I only know that his appearance was bright and dazzling. We were told once that he was an officer. Mamma I saw very seldom—my dearest remembrance of her was on one afternoon. Mamma drove out with Uncle Eric and one other gentleman. They took coffee in the garden saloon, and Uncle Eric chased me over the fields, threw me up in the air, and carried Charlotte whole hours in his arms. He was quite different then to what he is now; his face

was handsome and fresh-colored and his movements were all quick and bright. He could not have been more than twenty at that time?"

"He was twenty-one exactly when he left Paris forever," said the old man, with an increased gloomy aspect.

"Mamma seated herself at the piano," continued Dagobert, "and all the people cried out imploringly: 'The Tarantella, the Tarantella!' And then she sang so that the very walls trembled, and everybody went mad, and I with them. Madam Godin was often compelled to sing the same song again for me, in her weak old voice, when she wanted to coax me to be good and tractable, and never shall I forget that '*Gia la luna è in mezzo al mare, mamma mia si salterà!*' My mother's face I cannot, with the best will in the world, recall. With the exception of the song, Uncle Eric played the chief part for me that afternoon. If you were to show me all the female portraits in the world I could not pick my mother out. I only remember that she was very tall and slight and wore long black curls hanging down her shoulders. Perhaps I might have forgotten that too if mamma hadn't scolded me many a time for disarranging them with my wild caress. After this visit Uncle Eric used often to come alone; he used to spoil us then completely—quite different from nowadays. Then, all at once, he ceased to come for a long time, till one day he arrived suddenly and took me away from Madam Godin and Charlotte. That is all that I can tell you."

"It is quite sufficient," said Eckhof. "Herr Claudius may have been a partaker of the secret before and accompanied his brother and sister-in-law to see their children. The princess almost always went to Paris, when the duke traveled accompanied by his adjutant." He linked his arm in that of the young officer. "Now," we must observe the greatest caution and make further inquiries if we wish to attain our common object," said he, strolling away with Dagobert into the wood. "From Fräulein Fliedner, the only person in possession of the facts, you will of course never glean the smallest information; no doubt she would be hewn in pieces first. How innocent and harmless she can appear, can't she?—the old cat! The court lady, the traveling cavalier, and the princess' own physician, who also had access to the Carolinenlust at that time, are all dead."

"And Madam Godin, too—years ago," added Dagobert drearily.

"Only courage—we do not lack that; we will find ways and means," said Eckhof resolutely. "But as already said, all rashness must be guarded against, even should years pass by meantime."

They went on further. Charlotte did not accompany them. When she suddenly found herself alone she threw up her arms into the air and uttered something between a sob and a laugh. I was unable to distinguish whether it were the half-inarticulate expression of a frantic and indescribable joy or—insanity. Exactly thus had I seen my grandmother standing at the well. Terrified, I stooped down—pitter, patter, down went one of my shoes: the little nailed monster rustled down through the bushes with such vehemence that it sounded almost like the shot of a pistol. Charlotte uttered a half-smothered cry.

"Be quiet, for pity's sake," I called out, gliding down from the tree and running toward her.

"Ill-fated child, you have been listening!" came between my fingers from her lips. I had covered them with my hand. She shook it off with an angry gesture and scanned me with an irritated glance.

"Listening?" I repeated, deeply offended. "Can I help it if you choose to come walking under the tree I am seated on? Can I call out, 'Don't come here if you have any secret to tell each other, for I am perched up here and won't be seen at any price by that old man who is always tormenting me in his anger?' And why, may I ask, should I be an ill-fated child? I am delighted—delighted beyond expression, Fräulein Charlotte. Now all is well. Now you have a right to be proud. Only think, the Princess Margaret is your aunt!"

"Heavens! do you want to kill me?" she cried, shaking me so violently by the shoulder that I swayed about like thistle-down. Suddenly she let go her hold and began again pacing up and down with rapid strides.

"Don't believe it—I don't believe a word of it," she said, apparently calmer after a long pause, during which she seemed to struggle for breath. "The old man yonder has grown childish—he has been dreaming of those times, and now he fancies that a woman long since dead told him that fairy-tale. The matter receives some slight air of prob-

ability from the fact of Uncle Eric having adopted us. Up to this nobody has been able to divine his reason for so doing, and I maintain that it never was from motives of humanity. Nothing but an inspection of the Carolinenlust could convince me what amount of truth there may be in the old man's story—how far it really rests on facts. I find it impossible to believe that the haughty princess—and our whole ducal house is filled with the greatest and most evident pride—lived secretly married in the Carolinenlust. I would swear that were the seals removed this very day from the doors, nothing whatever would be found within but the household appointments of young boon companions, the home of a youthful bachelor.”

“Don't swear, Fräulein Charlotte,” I said in a whisper. I really felt like one bewitched and as if my brains were turned inside out. “A lady's silk mantle is hanging up in one of those rooms, and sheets of paper with ‘Sidonie, Princess of K.’ on them are lying on the writing-table. It must have been written by her own hand, for neither my father's writing nor yet Herr Claudius' are anything like so delicate. I think only a woman writes like that.”

Charlotte stared at me.

“You have been inside—behind the seals?”

“Yes, I have been inside,” I replied at once, though with downcast eyes; “I know a way and will take you up to the rooms also—but not till Ilse goes away.”

The moment I mentioned Ilse's name an indescribable feeling of anguish came over me. I felt as though she were standing near me with uplifted finger in an attitude of warning, as if I had done something very wrong which could never again be undone. Neither did it afford me the smallest comfort or consolation that Charlotte suddenly clasped me passionately in her arms and with a frantic outburst of joy pressed me to her heart. Had I not given up my good old Ilse for her?

XXIII.

ILSE's activity was called into greater request than ever during the next few days. She had discovered two locked-up chests among my father's goods containing house linen,

and which, from the time of my mother's death, had never seen the light. This gave rise to many a severe remark on the extraordinary man upstairs, who had all that broken trash unpacked as carefully as if it was made of sugar, while he allowed the finest table-cloths and sheets to rot away. Her face, however, assumed a more cheerful aspect as she saw the deep discoloring of time gradually give way to spotless snow-white beneath her busy hands, ably assisted as they were by the scorching rays of the sun. From this cause she naturally paid me less than her usual attention. She did not remark how often I threw myself upon her bosom in outbursts of tenderness, thereby endeavoring to atone for that treacherous "When Ilse is gone."

But other scruples also troubled me. It never occurred to me that there could be any danger to myself in thus mixing myself up in these mysterious affairs. I was far from possessing sufficient worldly wisdom for that. I was only conscious all at once of a kind of feeling of guilt toward the man in the front house who sat at his desk so unsuspectingly while everybody was secretly working their best against him. He was wrong—there was not the slightest doubt about that—he was depriving the two aspiring ones of their real name. I longed ardently that they should be put in their right position as soon as possible. But that under cover of the profoundest silence machinations should be carried on against him in his own very house and grounds; that the treacherous bookkeeper and the brother and sister following his example should sit at his table and converse with him face to face; that my father should be living in the Carolinenlust just as if it were his own home and acting just as he pleased in it while his child was acting like an enemy to the master of it—all this pained me to my very heart.

"You were listening to us yesterday," said Dagobert to me the following morning, knitting his brows fiercely as I, frightened by his unexpected appearance in the hall, endeavored to run past him. It seemed as though he had been waiting for me. The complaisant "familiar" had been transformed into an imperious gentleman since the night before. He looked just as proud and haughty as he had done on the hill in the haide—and that annoyed me. Still, those flashing brown eyes had so much power over

me that not one of the angry words upon my lips would find utterance.

"Charlotte's communications filled me with mortal terror," he continued. "I am positively certain that the sparrows will this very day be chattering about our secret on the house-top, for you are far too young and inexperienced to understand what all this is about. One single rash word from your lips will give our enemy the advantage and make our exertions unavailing forever."

"I shall not speak the word, however," I replied angrily. "We shall see who can keep a secret best."

So saying, I flew upstairs and rushed into the library. So there was a seal placed upon my lips now also, and sooner would I suffer death than allow one syllable to escape them.

Dagobert's harsh brevity toward me made me feel refractory. Charlotte, on the contrary, inspired me with timidity and anxiety. For whole hours she would stand with folded arms, gazing at the closed windows of the *bel-étage* of the Carolinenlust with devouring eyes. She seemed to me to have grown much paler, and whenever she could catch me for a moment she always seized me in her arms and whispered vehemently:

"When is Frau Ilse going? I can neither eat nor drink—I shall sink under this martyrdom."

The only refuge I had against these troubles was with my father. He was just putting the finishing touches to the now perfected antique cabinet, for the princess had announced formally that her visit would take place on the earliest occasion. He required my assistance, and if I began to handle the least attractive fragments of marble or terra-cotta with exactly the same care and delicacy as he did himself, it was entirely owing to the instructions with which our common task was interspersed. I began to discern, however faintly, the immortal spirit which dwelt within that "broken trash" which had for centuries been circling in the human mind, and still in every form, in every hue, indicates the link which unites every new phase with each mighty step of human progress.

And thus approached a woeful, dreadful day. The glowing gold of an unclouded sun shone on the tips of the forest trees and was reflected back from the blue waters of the lake. How I hated that lake anew, with its shining

statues, its masses of foliage already touched with the approaching autumn's tints. I stared on them all with a beating heart—the rich coloring lost itself in my sparkling tears.

“You must not cry, child, positively not,” said Ilse, passing her hard hand over my eyes. She had her traveling-dress on, on the table lay her Sunday bonnet, and a little further off the box containing her few possessions, into which she had just knocked the last nail. She had already been upstairs to take leave of my father. I was not allowed to accompany her, but as I waited on the stairs below I could plainly hear the tones of entreaty in which she once more poured forth her sorely oppressed heart. She returned with cheeks like a red-hot coal. The excitement, however, did not prevent her from using her duster as she came down. At every step she paused to polish the marble stair, for the princess, as she said, would be coming within an hour, and everything must look “shining with cleanliness.”

She then brought out the case of pearls which my grandmother gave me.

“There, child,” she said, laying the necklace round my bare neck. “The princess must see that you did not come to your father altogether penniless. I know what an amount of money lies concealed in things like that. I have sometimes had to witness it when my poor lady was obliged to sell piece after piece of the Jacobsohn inheritance.”

Her bonnet was then tied on hurriedly, her great shawl drawn over her shoulders so as to conceal the box which she had taken up under her left arm, then, taking me with her, she marched, without ever looking round, toward the front house. I held her right hand in mine and kept pressing it to my breast as I followed her unconsciously. Not till we reached the hall did I draw back, for Ilse did not go toward Fräulein Fliedner's room, but at her request old Erdmann pointed out the so-called new office belonging to Herr Claudius.

“Are you going to act like a fool to the very last?” she inquired in a harsh tone as she laid down her box and proceeded without further ceremony to open the door shown her.

Grumblingly I followed her into the dusky green room.

I had not seen Herr Claudius again since the evening I had so hurt him—I had just as soon kept out of his way forever. Now, however, I was compelled to meet him, so I did it with as much daring as I could command. He, indeed, had plenty of guilt on his conscience, but I had none, no, none whatever!

He sat in one of the southern windows writing. When he saw us enter the door he drew a string. The green curtains flew asunder, and through the fragrant lattice-work of shrubs outside shone the colored fields of flowers from the garden yonder. He stood up and offered Ilse his hand. I fancied after our last meeting that his eyes would look quite different, but they rested on me with just the same grave expression as on that day of our first meeting at his writing-table—they intimidated me.

“Herr Claudius, now it has come in reality,” said Ilse, and the pain of parting, which she had hitherto so bravely suppressed, betrayed itself in every tone. “I must go home now unless the Dierkhof is to slip out of my hands entirely. God knows how heavy my heart is, but you are my consolation. You know what you promised me, and—there is Lenore!”

Before I could foresee what she was about she had seized my hand and wanted to place it in Herr Claudius’. He turned away his face and opened a book he held in his hand. I understood him at once—I had lately shuddered at his touch.

“I will watch over her indefatigably, Frau Ilse,” he replied, with his usual calmness; “but if I shall eventually succeed in leading or even influencing her yet remains to be seen——”

“Herr Claudius, you never mean that the child will be wanting in proper respect?” interrupted Ilse. “Lenore knows very well that the doctor is so occupied with his own affairs that he has little time to think of her, and some other there must be who will act toward her as a father”—I noticed a slight flush rise to his cheek and spread over his whole face at this observation—“till she can return home to the Dierkhof. I say it again, you are my consolation in this bitter moment, and though you haven’t given Lenore your hand—still, you are a grave, stern man and she is still a mere child in thought and deed——”

"You are quite mistaken there," he interrupted her. Oh, what torment! There was Ilse now probing the wound which I had given him. The deep sense of remorse once more assailed me at this moment, though I could make it all up again—but no, I dared not now. I should have been as false then as the old bookkeeper, who betrayed his master and yet to all appearance kept on a good footing with him. "What your young charge will stand in deepest need of just at present, Frau Ilse," added Herr Claudius, "will be comfort." His eyes, to my great confusion, were fixed immovably on my face. "She looks so pale I fear that horror and disgust at the limited space to which she is confined, and which already weighs upon her, will now become intolerable." He took a new key from the wall and laid it on the table before me. "I know where you will first be able to soothe the pain of parting, Fräulein von Sassen," he said. "I have had the lock of the garden gate newly arranged. The key belongs to you; you can now visit the Helldorf family undisturbed and enjoy your little pet's society as often as you like."

Ilse looked surprised, but there was no time for further explanations. A carriage came rattling over the pavement in the yard.

"Frau Ilse, it is time you were gone," said Herr Claudius, looking out of a window, from which he drew back the curtain. His carriage was standing at the yard gate and old Erdmann was just lifting Ilse's trunk into it.

"Ah, what! Surely I am not going to drive in the carriage!" cried Ilse in amazement.

"Why not? I thought the parting would be over sooner than if you left the house on foot."

"Well, then, in God's name. There, child, don't forget the key," she said, thrusting it into my pocket. "I don't know what the object of it is, but Herr Claudius gave it to you, and so I leave it without question in your hands."

She shook him heartily by the hand. In the hall outside stood Fräulein Fliedner and Charlotte. I was unable to bear the young girl's sparkling eyes and beaming smile and laid my head sobbing on Ilse's breast. It beat heavily with suppressed tears. I could hear her hard breathing. For one moment her arms inclosed me vehemently. I saw Herr Claudius as through a mist standing between

the green curtains above. He privately signed to Ilse to cut the torture short; it was needless—I did it myself. With hands pressed to my temples I fled through the garden, and only when I had crossed the bridge did I hear the carriage rolling through the gateway in the distance.

I closed the shutters, bolted the door, and threw myself into the corner of the sofa where Ilse had sat last. I lay thus for hours in the deepest anguish.

The Princess Margaret came; my father received her in the hall. I heard Herr von Wismar and the maid of honor chasing the crane, who had no doubt approached too near to the right honorable lady to make his obeisance. The steps paused at the *bel-étage*; the princess was probably gazing at the mysteriously sealed doors. A frightful oppression seized me now Ilse was gone and the moment near to which I had pledged myself when I could add incontestable proof of the bookkeeper's communications. I put my hand in my pocket and flung the key to the furthest end of the room as though it burned my fingers. I was trusted where I was deceiving. Strange to say, that man in the front house was always at my side, turn which way I would, tenderly caring for me, grave and quiet, but not to be repulsed, and yet I did not want any tie with him. I clung to the others, exclusively to the others; one day he must learn that—to his sorrow. I buried my face still deeper in the pillow. At this moment even the faint streak of light which crept through the shutters pained me. The princess ascended still higher and my father knocked at my door; he wanted to fetch me. I never moved and was delighted when I heard the whole party leave the house. But not long after Charlotte came racing up the corridor. She rattled unceremoniously at my door and called out my name in an imperious tone. When I opened the door there she stood, looking haughtier and handsomer than ever and in the most magnificent toilet.

“Quick, quick,” she exclaimed impatiently, “the princess wants to see you. I really think you are out of your wits, hiding yourself that way in Egyptian darkness and locking yourself up, all because you have got rid of that home-bred sermonizer! Get away with your sentimentality!”

She ran her fingers through my hair, shook out my dis-

ordered dress, and the arm she passed round my waist led me along with such power that I quickly found myself on the road to the front house.

"I happened to be in the garden with Dagobert, quite accidentally, just as the princess was passing through on her way to the hot-houses," said Charlotte in a careless tone—with all my simplicity and boundless faith in every word she uttered, I could not refrain from casting a questioning glance at the studied elegance in which she had "accidentally" attired herself—"and what do you think? Your absent papa, who generally speaking scarcely knows me from old Erdmann, actually undertook to present us, and, only fancy, it succeeded—succeeded perfectly. He never once confounded me with Dagobert!"

There was the old imperious tone again, which always overawed me with its assumption of superiority.

"Uncle Eric was also caught by the court party, of course quite contrary to his intention," she continued. "Just as the princess stepped in he was giving directions as to some alteration in the large conservatory at the rockery. I am positive he is already secretly anathematizing the court journal, which will, as a matter of course, give the whole account of the ducal visit to the Claudius establishment in all its minutest details to-morrow. Of course he doesn't allow this to be seen. He has enshrined himself in the imperturbable calm and placidity of all his burgher virtues, and looks exactly as if it were he who was doing the high society honor! Ridiculous; and I really believe it produces an effect upon the princess. She smelled, if possible, every little flower, and is now gone to the front house to inspect the whole establishment dutifully. That odious back room, for instance. Well, that is a matter of taste."

We entered the hall just as the princess was leaving this same back room. She was walking beside Herr Claudius and had a magnificent bouquet in her hand.

"Where was the haide princess hiding?" she inquired as she kindly smiled at me. So Charlotte had already found an opportunity for acquainting her with my *sobriquet*.

"In a room like a dungeon, your highness," said the young lady, answering for me. "The little thing is sad because she has had to part from her old servant to-day."

"I must beg you will speak differently of Frau Ilse,

Charlotte," said Herr Claudius. "She has during years of love and faithful care sought to supply the place of a mother to Fräulein von Sassen."

"Well, then, she deserves that you should have cried your eyes out for her," said the princess lovingly to me and kissing my forehead.

Just at that moment Fräulein Fliedner came downstairs holding a huge bunch of keys in her hand, and making a low courtesy announced that everything was thrown open. The antiquated mercantile house interested the princess extremely, and she expressed a wish to see the upper rooms also, when Herr Claudius told her that they had remained untouched for years. My father, accompanied by Herr von Wismar and the lady-in-waiting, now issued, laughing, from Fräulein Fliedner's room; they had been inspecting the presses filled with all kinds of rarities in glass.

My eyes followed Herr Claudius involuntarily as he slowly ascended the stairs beside the royal lady. Charlotte was right: in his proud reserve and native nobility the "kramer" looked as if he were conferring honor, not receiving it; and it suddenly struck me as if this nimbus of unsought grandeur shed a natural elevation over the house of his fathers, over the huge stone arches which majestically echoed back every word, every step, and on that broad, massive staircase, with its solid yet exquisitely delicate iron balustrade.

The upper rooms no doubt exhibited the old burgher taste and practical mercantile sense, which had selected arrangements suitable "for all times." Removed as far from the gay splendor of the Carolinenlust as heaven from earth, it nevertheless abounded in signs of wealth. There were no soft, luxurious cushions covered with rich white satin; the furniture there was all carved, indeed, out of the most valuable wood, but angular and wanting in all grace—probably something like those who had once dwelt among it; and instead of roguish eyes, flower goddesses looked down from their frames on the walls, with here and there an exception in the shape of some well-bred German lady by Holbein, with downcast eyes and exquisitely painted head-gear. But the indelible colors of real Gobelin tapestry also ornamented the walls; the floors were covered with leather stamped in real gold and

the windows were hung with thick heavy brocade of gloomy magnificence.

The stern spirit of the old German burgher times, which even the walls here had caught, might be pleasing enough as well as surprising to the princess. She passed through the open door of the first saloon and took up a silver bumper in both her hands, an enormous, perfectly gigantic vessel which was standing in the middle of the room on an oaken table. She laughingly endeavored to raise it to her lips. At that moment Herr Claudius sprang to her side and caught the heavy goblet—it had slipped out of her hands. She was gazing, pale as death, at the portrait of the handsome Lothar.

For a few moments, unable to speak, she covered her face with her hands.

If anything can recall us to ourselves in moments of anguish it is the awkward interference of others on our behalf. Fräulein von Wildenspring rushed toward her mistress and made an attempt as if to support her. The princess collected herself and threw her off with a haughty movement.

“What are you thinking of, Constance?” she said in a slightly tremulous voice. “Are my nerves so very weak that you suspect me of a tendency to faint? May one not exhibit some signs of emotion when one suddenly beholds a form long since departed standing before one almost as if it were alive? I must have left my smelling-bottle in the conservatory. I wish you would fetch it.”

The maid of honor and Herr von Wismar disappeared instantly down the corridor. Dagobert and Charlotte retreated to one of the window niches behind the impenetrable curtains, and my father was already in the next room examining a carved crucifix. The room was virtually empty for a few minutes. Breathing with suppressed emotion, the princess approached the picture. After a pause of unbroken silence she beckoned Herr Claudius toward her.

“Was this picture taken for you?” she inquired, panting for breath.

“No, your highnesses.”

“Then do you not know to whom it once belonged?”

“It is the only article out of my brother’s former dwelling which I appropriated to myself.”

"Ah, his house in the Carolinenlust," she said, evidently relieved. "So, then, you took it from his own house. Who painted it? That never came from the brush of our pedantic old court painter Krause—he was quite incapable of infusing so much life into the eyes."

She was silent for a moment and stood with her handkerchief to her lips.

"It could not have been painted long before—before he left us," she continued in touching tones. "That little silver star, which he wears among his other orders, was instituted by my sister Sidonie about two years before his death, in a joyous mood at a picnic. It bore the device 'Treu und verschwiegen,'* and naturally had no other value in the eyes of him who wore it than the remembrance of an hour pleasantly spent."

Silence once more, broken this time by a faint rustling of the curtains.

"Strange," said the princess, looking up suddenly. "Claudius never wore rings. People used to say it was from vanity, that the unequalled beauty of his hand might not be eclipsed, and there—look there at the small circlet of gold on his finger. I knew that hand well, I have seen it so often, and up to that awful moment always without that peculiar simple ring. Why is it there? It looks like a wedding-ring."

Herr Claudius made no answer. His delicate lips, which were always tightly shut, as is frequently the case with thoughtful people, showed a still thinner line than usual. Did he notice that Charlotte's eyes as well as mine were actually glaring at him?

"Dear, dear, where was my imagination carrying me?" said the princess after a short pause, with a melancholy smile. "He was never even engaged—the whole world knows that. At the same time, tell me, did no one claim the picture after his death?"

"Your highness, there was nobody except myself who had any claim to anything belonging to Lothar."

What was that? The answer was so utterly free from all embarrassment, it bore such unmistakable evidence of the sternest reality, that not a doubt remained. Charlotte looked from behind the curtain with all the tokens of

* "Faithful and secret."

mortal terror. Evidently she had received the same impression as I had. Dagobert alone measured his uncle with a long, contemptuous glance, and a malicious smile curled his lips. He was sure of his story; he was unalterably convinced that the man yonder had lied. Which of the two were wrong? I still wished the brother and sister to be victorious, but I was also of opinion that never again could I believe any man should it prove true that such a person as Herr Claudius had brought himself to stoop to such a low deception.

The two who had been sent on the wild-goose chase for the smelling-bottle came back shrugging their shoulders and with empty hands. The bottle was finally discovered in the princess' pocket, who had by this time resumed her usual dignified bearing. Only upon her cheeks, usually tinged with but the faintest touch of rose, still lingered a deep purple flush.

Fräulein von Wildenspring anxiously related that the sky was overcast with black clouds, indicating an approaching storm, in which she was confirmed by the increasing darkness of the rooms. The princess, however, seated herself notwithstanding and partook of some of the delicious fruit which Fräulein Fliedner offered her in a silver basket. Those present formed in a group around her. My father alone was absent. In one of the most distant chambers upstairs he was wandering about, examining one piece of furniture after another. He appeared to have forgotten entirely who he had come with, and he was left to himself amid many smiles.

I felt so strange and broken-hearted that I should not have cared had the whole ceiling fallen down into the sultry room, nor should I have felt surprised at such an impossibility occurring as that of the handsome Lothar stepping down from his frame into the midst of the assembled company. How expressive were his eyes and how warm and life-like that hand, "unrivalled in its beauty," which bore the simple ring so fraught with mighty consequences!

Perhaps the princess noticed these uneasy thoughts flitting across my face, for she beckoned to me.

"My child, you must not be so sad," she said gently and kindly, while I, abashed by the gaze of so many eyes all centered on me, sank involuntarily on my knees at her

side. I had often done so with Ilse. She laid her hand on my head and bent it down. "Haide princess! how pretty that sounds. But you are no real child of the northern haide, with your little brown face and small Oriental-shaped nose, your dark refractory locks and shy defiance in your every feature and motion. Far more do you resemble a princess of the steppes, before whose feet the stolen treasures are nightly poured and who decks herself with costly pearls from the East. Ah! look how right I was!" She smiled and took up the pearl necklace which had fallen down on my bosom. For one moment she allowed them to pass through her fingers in amazement. "But these are really the very finest pearls which you are wearing," she said in great admiration. "Are they your own property, and who gave you this string of such exquisite rarity?"

"My grandmother."

"Your father's mother? Oh, yes. If I don't mistake she was an Olderode, one of that wealthy and very ancient race—was she not, my child?"

A movement just above the princess' head caused me to look up. There stood Dagobert, with uplifted finger, and his eye met mine with a magnetic and piercing expression. "Say nothing" was the meaning of his whole bearing. Like a kind of dream it recurred to me that he had warned me once already; but at that hideous moment I could neither find time nor power to think "why?" Under the influence of that look and in a state of utter confusion I stammered:

"I don't know."

What had I done? As I uttered the last word the spell was broken and horror seized me at the sound of my own deceitful voice. What! I had actually admitted before all those people that I didn't know if my grandmother was or was not descended from the wealthy and ancient house of Olderode? What a lie! I knew as well as I knew my own name that she had been a Jacobsohn. I saw her die in the Jewish faith and had been her last comfort. What object could I have had in this positive denial of the truth? I had spoken almost mechanically under strange influences, and only felt with the deepest sorrow that I would be ashamed all my life long of that moment. And forth everybody—even Dagobert—nodded applause,

what then? There was one who judged me severely. He looked at me with undisguised amazement, turned away, and left the room. That was Herr Claudius.

I struggled with myself, but didn't find the courage to atone for my fault by at once confessing it. Shame and the fear of making myself ridiculous sealed my lips, and the momentary silence which followed my answer was soon broken. The first burst of the storm came sweeping through the street and raised a stifling whirlwind which blew the withered stalks and leaves and the gray dust of the pavement against the windows. It struck the weather-cock yonder, and a deep yellow flash of lightning shot in; it shone on the window-panes of the opposite houses with a blinding glare and threw a pale and flickering reflection on the walls and contents of our half-dark drawing-room.

The princess rose as every one hastened to the window in alarm; even my father looked up from his interesting researches and hurried toward us. In my state of calm despair I saw everything that passed around me like one in a dream. I saw Herr Claudius return into the room, looking just as unmoved in every way as usual; but just at that moment I discovered why the princess looked at him so fixedly whenever he addressed her. It was because the self-same light shone in his eyes as in the picture yonder; that light which she had described as "the soul" and which the pedantic old court painter could never have caught. She took his arm and let him lead her downstairs. I followed mechanically beside Fräulein Fliedner. Her gentle glance was somewhat cold and distant as it met mine. Ah, yes, had she not also been a witness of the warning I had received from Dagobert in the greenhouse? and now she saw the black stain of a lie upon my brow. I bit my lip and passed out. The ladies' silken trains came rustling downstairs, and the princess' soft sweet voice was occasionally heard between. I thought I had never before heard her speaking in such gentle, heartfelt tones. She was assuring Herr Claudius that she would come again to visit that interesting patriarchal mansion. Fräulein von Wildenspring and the chamberlain laid their heads together at this announcement. Then the impertinent young maid of honor gathered her train up on her arm and cast suspicious looks at the steps, while Herr Wismar waved his handkerchief in the air—precisely her

Dagobert had done that time on the hill—as a protest against the princess' intention, which they did not venture to show more openly. Charlotte was walking behind them. I saw sideways how the color rose to her cheek and what an expression of intense anger curled her lips, but even that failed for the moment to touch me. I was suddenly awakened from the stupor which had taken possession of me.

"Bravo!" was whispered in my ear. "The haide princess bore herself bravely. Now I am quite at ease with regard to my secret." And Dagobert bent so close and so confidentially toward me that I felt his breath upon me.

Had I suddenly received some malicious, painful blow it could not have irritated me more than that whisper. I felt hatred toward those brown eyes laughing at me. They had lured me to the thoughtless act, and the warm breath which I felt upon my very cheek offended and incensed me. That was no longer the man for whose sake I would gladly undergo any punishment. He was false, that handsome Tancred, and his beautiful chestnut locks were like serpents hanging in rings from his forehead. Unable to control myself, I tried to hit him; then, rushing madly downstairs, I took my father's arm, who had just reached the last step beside the princess.

"See, see, my child, we are not now in the haide!" said he, gently reproving me for my boisterous demeanor. The court satellites had sprung to one side alarmed as I brushed past them, and even the princess looked round, somewhat surprised at the noise.

"Oh, you must not scold the little wild bird, doctor," she said kindly. "Let us only rejoice that her natural gayety has returned so quickly and dispelled the sorrow of parting."

It was enough to throw one into despair. My utter disgust now seemed simply like childish impetuosity, and Herr Claudius would think so too. He did not even look at my small person, however; he seemed to have forgotten my existence. Well, it was quite right; I had merited that punishment well.

XXIV.

THE air in the hall was heavy laden with the concentrated perfume of the flower-beds outside, which the sultriness of the atmosphere had intensified. As yet not one drop of rain had fallen to cool the thirsty ground, but on the stone pavement in the yard little splinters of wood and scraps of paper were strewed about in rows here and there, and the poplars by the river were shedding their smooth leaves by thousands—the tempest was gathering force for a fresh burst.

The princess stepped hastily into her carriage, which had just driven up from the next street, and my father, who was summoned to the prince, accompanied her. To Herr Claudius she once more gave her hand; Charlotte and Dagobert, on the other hand, received a kind and elegant bow, for which they gratefully bent to the earth in return. In the hurry-skurry my little person was quite overlooked—and it was quite right so, for I turned my back on them all, and crossing the yard opened the garden gate. I had some trouble in keeping my feet; the storm was raging anew and broke over the large plot. It seized me fiercely and tore the gate out of my hands. Gathering all my strength together, I once more got hold of it and banged it after me. It was never allowed to remain open according to the strict rules of the house.

Now forward. I staggered a few steps further, struggling for breath, and felt as if I had been suddenly plunged amid swelling waves. How that colored sea of flowers was, as it were, flooding the earth! How it rose and fell! How it sometimes showed nothing but the pale green of the stalks and leaves, and then burst afresh into its gaudy splendor! And how the tall, elegant Italian poplars shivered and shimmered in the storm, yielding and bending their light forms to the blast!

All at once the ground went from under my feet; then I found myself in the midst of a bed of heliotropes, and lastly I was thrown against the garden wall. Catching hold of the projecting stones with outstretched arms, I clung to the wall, leaning my head against it, and thus allowed the might of the tempest to pass over me. I looked shyly from beneath the disheveled locks which

flew in my face, for the gate near me creaked and opened and Herr Claudius entered. He turned his head in every direction and finally discovered me.

"Ah, the storm has blown her there," he exclaimed, immediately coming to my relief. Not a hair of mine did the wind raise from that time.

"Really, just like an unfortunate little swallow that had been thrown out of its nest!" laughed Dagobert, who had followed and was now supporting himself by clinging to the pillars of the gate.

I let my arms fall quickly from the wall and turned my head away—that was just the laugh which had hunted me through the haide under the Dierkhof's roof.

"Come back to the other house. You cannot reach the Carolinenlust," said Herr Claudius gently to me.

I shook my head.

"Well, then, I will go with you. Unaided it would be impossible for you to keep your feet."

" My plaidie
I'd shelter thee"

rang through my excited mind. No, I would not have either; for him with falsehood on his brow I loathed, and before him who was so patient and kind with me I felt both shame and terror.

"I need no mantle to protect me—I will battle through alone," I said in a suppressed voice and looking up at him, but through trembling, sparkling tears, which with all my efforts I was unable to repress. My teeth chattered as if I had the ague.

Herr Claudius looked at me, Dagobert laughing meanwhile. A peculiar expression came over his face.

"You are ill," he said in a low voice, bending over me. "I dare not leave you alone now. Be good and go with me."

This inexhaustible patience and thoughtfulness for an unworthy little being whom he must thoroughly despise, and who, despite everything, maintained her willful demeanor, broke down my obstinacy. The raging of the wind also was beginning to subside, and feeling quite able now to keep my feet, I quitted my retreat.

Dagobert was still standing at the gate. The few words

Herr Claudius had addressed to me in that low tone and my sudden consent to go with him had evidently awakened his mistrust. He laid one finger warningly on his lips and the other hand he shook at me menacingly. He then returned into the yard and shut the gate. Unnecessary warning! not a word would escape my lips. First to lie and then be guilty of treachery. Herr Claudius himself would have detested me, even if my communications had been of the utmost importance to him. But I could not help thinking at the same time of Heinz' dismal stories of souls that had sold themselves: I was just like such a soul, fluttering hither and thither, unable to find rest.

We reached the nearest conservatory with a few rapid strides. I was not once compelled to avail myself of my companion's protection. My clothes, indeed, blew wildly about me, but still I was able to keep my feet the whole time. All at once a long-continued and awful flash of red lightning struck the tops of the rustling poplars; immediately after a deafening peal of thunder rolled through the air, and the first drops of rain fell thick and heavy against the panes of glass. We entered hastily and took up our place in the midst of the tall foreign plants which, unassailable by the fury without, stood there calm and still.

I looked up sideways at my silent companion. He stood equally isolated in the midst of human tumult—was it really because he concealed dark secrets within his breast? He had caught my glance and looked inquiringly into my face.

"The rapid movement has brought back the color to your lips," he said. "Are you better?"

"I am not ill," I replied, looking down.

"No, but dreadfully excited and your nerves shaken," he added. "No wonder: it is the change of atmosphere. No young soul ever exchanges the quiet solitude, where temptations to evil are rare, for the world's society with impunity."

I understood him perfectly—how gently he judged my offense! Yesterday I should have thought it was because he deceived the world himself; now I could not think that any longer.

"I should like so much to make this transition easier to you," he went on. "Yonder, in the saloon, a short time ago I said to myself the only means of effecting that would

be to send you as quickly as possible out of my own house, but I am not infallible in my judgment. I may err, too, as to the hands in which I would place your weal and woe."

"I won't go, either," I said, interrupting him. "Do you think I would have remained here an hour longer after the torture of parting? I should have followed Ilse on foot to the haide only I must stay with my father. I know quite well that the child belongs to the father, and he wants me; ignorant and childish as I am, still he has become accustomed to me."

He looked at me with surprise.

"You have more strength of will than I thought. It takes a great deal to bring under the sway of duty a nature which has grown up perfectly free and uncontrolled. Good! then we will abandon the idea. It only occurred to me in an evil moment, full of depressing fears—that moment when I saw you stumbling."

At these words he turned away and busied himself so completely in giving a new direction to one of the magnificent blossoms which was pressing against one of the panes that he seemed to be entirely absorbed in the occupation. He appeared unconscious that I buried my face in my hands, to hide the glow of shame which rose there.

"You have no confidence in me—that is, it is systematically rubbed out of you; for you certainly did not bring the slightest mistrust of the world or mankind here with you," he continued with deep gravity. "I have found it difficult in your case to assume the *rôle* of the faithful Eckhardt, whose lot it was to warn men against attractive sins and was in consequence rarely loved; but that shall not prevent my entering on my duty this very hour. Perhaps when your knowledge of the world becomes more extended—perhaps you will then see that mine was a faithful hand, stretched forth almost in a parental sense to guard the child from knocking its head against the corners. And this hope shall suffice. Don't count the grains of sand, though, so busily as they lie at your feet," said he, suddenly interrupting himself. "Won't you look up just once? I should like to know what you are thinking."

"I am thinking that you will prevent my intercourse with Charlotte," I replied, suddenly looking up.

"Not quite. Under my own eyes or in Fräulein Flied-

ner's society you may meet her as often as you like. But I earnestly implore you to avoid being alone with her as far as possible. As I have already told you, her head is filled with unhealthy fancies, and I may not permit you to be infected with similar nonsense. Only this very day was I witness to the rapidity with which a pure and guileless human soul becomes the prey of such influences. Promise me you will obey me."

Forgetting himself, he stretched out his hand.

"I cannot do that," I exclaimed, while he, turning pale, withdrew his hand in sudden terror. "I feel hot and nervous in this sultry atmosphere"—and really my heart was beating to suffocation. "See, the rain is beginning to moderate. I have the shelter of the trees up to the Carolinenlust. Let me go out."

With these words I bounded out, along the river's bank. The weather was worse than ever and in a moment I was deluged with rain. I held my hand before my eyes to shelter myself from rushing blindly against the trees or into the river, and never paused till I reached the hall of the Carolinenlust. Thank God, I no longer heard that gentle voice that in spite of everything touched me as though a warm living heart beat within.

I threw off my saturated muslin dress, slipped into the despised black frock, and threw open the shutters. I was totally alone in the large house. Outside in one corner the poultry, whom the storm had driven all together, were screaming and cackling. Cowering into a corner, I undid the pearls from my neck. With fearful life-like power did I again behold my grandmother's half-closed eyes and once more hear her failing voice say, "Ilse, lay the string round the little brown throat," and then to me: "They suit your face, my child; you have your mother's eyes, but the Jacobsohn features." The name which I this day pretended ignorance of was actually written on my face. Was there a more deceitful, faithless being on the face of the earth than myself? What road was I going? How often during the last few weeks had I allowed myself to be betrayed into acting wrongly and foolishly? But I would grow good again—I pressed the pearls with inward enthusiasm to my lips—and would never again rush blindly into anything without inquiring who might be hurt thereby.

Outside the storm and rain were raging on. It seemed

as if two tempests were engaged in battle in the air. Suddenly, to my great terror, I saw two forms approaching from the bosquet and running toward the house—it was the brother and sister.

“There, child, that is the way one must struggle through if they would seek traces of their fortune,” said Charlotte, entering, out of breath. She threw her umbrella, which was broken to pieces, into one corner of the room, her dripping shawl upon the sofa, and began to dry her face and hair with her pocket-handkerchief.

“At last,” she exclaimed. “We had to stay there, stretched on the rack, as long as Uncle Eric remained in the garden. Now he is settled in his office, and Eckhof with him, to whom, in accordance with your wish, we have not told that you are our confidante. Your papa is at the castle—nothing could be more fortunate. We are lords of the soil. Forward, then!”

“Now?” I cried, shuddering. “It must be enough to frighten one to death up there now.”

Dagobert broke into a loud laugh, but Charlotte grew crimson and stamped at me with her foot.

“For goodness’ sake, don’t be such a coward,” she exclaimed violently. “I am dying with impatience, and you go on with such fooleries. Do you really think I would go patiently and quietly to bed after waiting all this time for that Ilse to be gone, whom I thought we never should get rid of—indeed, that I would wait till evening came, without settling the doubt Uncle Eric infused into my mind to-day? I should die of the beating of my heart. And in addition to that, Dagobert joins his regiment to-morrow. He must first have convincing proofs. Not a moment’s delay will we allow you. Keep your word. Forward! forward, child!”

She seized me by the shoulder and shook me. Hitherto I had regarded the handsome girl with a timid love and admiration; now I began to fear her, and her style and manner of speaking of Ilse thoroughly disgusted me. I remained quite still, however, for I had slipped my own head into the noose and could not draw it out again. Silently I opened the door of my bedroom and pointed to the press.

“Move it away?” inquired Charlotte, understanding me at once.

I assented, and almost at the same moment the brother and sister had seized the piece of furniture and pushed it aside. The door was disclosed to view. Charlotte opened it and went up the steps. She stood motionless for one moment, and turning very pale pressed her hand to her heart, as though she would choke in the very act. Then she flew up and Dagobert and I followed.

I was right—it was terribly gloomy up there. The tempest was raging furiously around that very corner as though it would carry it away and with it destroy every hidden vestige and record of those mysterious circumstances about to be brought to light. Behind the rose-colored blinds we could hear the unwearied foaming of the water; even the deceptive light shed by the pink draperies was overcome by the outward gloom.

To open the door, enter, and seize the mantle which hung over the partition was to Charlotte the work of a moment; she took it down from the nail and spread it out.

“It is a domino which might belong to a gentleman just as well as to a lady,” said she dejectedly and letting it fall on the carpet. Slightly shrugging her shoulders, she proceeded to examine the dressing-table apparatus with evident anxiety. “Pomade and *poudre de riz*, with several bottles of some fine wash,” said she, blowing away the thick coating of dust. “Just the way the toilet-table of a handsome young officer, adored by the ladies, would look; isn’t it, Dagobert? The handsome Lothar was as vain as any lady. If you have no better proof to adduce, child, things look badly,” said she to me, looking back over her shoulder in apparent calm; but I saw something glimmering in her eyes which filled me still with a kind of pity—it was dead anxiety and the deepest dejection.

Suddenly she uttered a tremulous cry, then one of victory, which rang through me. She stretched out her arms, rushed through an open door of an adjoining apartment, and threw herself upon the basket which stood near the bed under a canopy.

“Our cradle, Dagobert, our cradle. Oh, Heaven!” she exclaimed, while her brother sprang to one of the windows and drew back the curtain. Pale and flickering shone the daylight on the tiny faded pillow where Charlotte had hidden her face.

“It is true, all true, every iota,” she murmured, raising

herself. "I bless the woman in her grave who listened. Dagobert, here did our royal mother hear our first cry! Our royal mother, the proud daughter of the Duke of K.! How bewitching that sounds, and it throws into the shade those aristocrats who have turned up their noses at the merchant's adopted children. Oh, I am overcome with joy!" she exclaimed, interrupting herself suddenly and pressing her hands to her forehead. "Our cruel enemy, he in the shop yonder, was quite right when he told me lately I must first learn to bear the truth! I am dazzled."

"For my sake, then, cease this blustering," said Dagobert in a tone of annoyance and vexation, letting the curtain fall again over the window. "Let us have a little reason now; this extravagant demeanor is quite incomprehensible. Such proofs were quite unnecessary to convince me. I was fully satisfied with old Eckhof's information, and it too was but the ray of light which fully awoke the inward conviction which our own hearts, our own blood, had already given us."

Charlotte spread the green veil once more tenderly over the little bed.

"Thank God for this mental peace," she said, more composed. "My skeptical brain has given me trouble during the last few days. Oh, you dear innocent!" she said, laughing in a jeering tone at me. "You prattled to me about specimens of a lady's handwriting and a woman's cloak which would have formed but sorry kind, of proofs, and this room, with all its important details, escaped your silly eye! Are you, then, really so awfully—harmless? With one word you could have spared me all the martyrdom I have lately endured."

I scarcely heeded this scornful, sarcastic voice. I was thinking regretfully of the pathetic description which Eckhof had insensibly depicted of those who had once inhabited the now sealed chambers. Everything belonging to the secret which two long-departed souls had shared was now being raked up ruthlessly, the sheltering dust blown away. How anxiously had this secret been guarded! Even the princess' sister knew nothing of it. Who, then, could tell but that those two had ardently desired that even in death the veil should remain drawn? They both lay in their graves now—the beautiful princess and the poor man with that stain on his handsome brow; neither

could keep off strange hands and eyes—unless, indeed, they were permitted to return and give warnings, as the gloomy fanatic had said. Awfully alive in very deed were now those chambers where I had seen naught save the noiseless sunbeams playing and dancing about. Yes, outside the tempest was indeed thundering against the walls like a battering-ram, but inside it seemed to expire in faint groans at the ceiling. The loose curtains became gradually inflated with wind and rustled like a woman's dress along the floor; here and there a pale streak of light crept in, faintly lighting up the violet bed-curtains and the grim shadows in the corners—like a phantom doomed to wander midway between heaven and earth.

It was very daring to select this hour of terrible tumult for violating in secret the carefully guarded relics of a dead man—so I thought, with anxious, beating heart; but I held my tongue. What could my poor voice effect in the face of such passion and—now the right word for Charlotte's extravagant bearing occurred to me—against this eagerness for a higher position and distinction?

They both stood before the writing-table which I had so sternly respected that I had scarcely ventured to breathe over it. Now every single thing upon it was tossed hither and thither with the speed of lightning.

"Here are mamma's arms on a seal, writing-materials, and sheets of paper," said Charlotte, her voice still quivering, but all her usual proud calm and self-reliance once more evident in her demeanor. "And there various old letters." She drew out the envelopes from beneath a paper-weight. "'To her Highness the Princess Sidonie von K., Lucerne.'" See there, Dagobert every one of these letters has been in Switzerland; they all bear the post-mark. A confidante of mamma's must no doubt have been always on the road in her stead, received the letters, and conveyed them secretly to the Carolinenlust."

Dagobert returned no answer. He was rattling at the lock of the table. The key was wanting, but according to Eckhof's statements its drawer contained Lothar's pocket-book, with the necessary documents, tightly and hopelessly shut in. Shrugging his shoulders and with a gloomy brow, Dagobert turned away, pulled back one of the curtains and surveyed the state of the weather; while Charlotte, throwing the envelopes carelessly on the table,

walked to the other end of the room. There stood a piano—in my late rapid flight I had not remarked it. Charlotte opened it at once and struck chords which ought perhaps never again to have been heard. They at all events resisted; they had voices, and fearfully discordant ones. Accompanied by the clang of broken strings, they vibrated in such shrill tones against the walls of the room that even Charlotte's strong nerves gave way, and shrinking back she closed the lid of the instrument. She was terrified; but of that palpitating shyness, that feeling of tender reverence with which my thoughts invested every lifeless object with a kind of feeling—of these not a single trace appeared to animate her. She seized the music which lay on the piano and foraged among it till she suddenly shrieked once more, in a half-suppressed, but still triumphant voice, "*Gia la luna in mezzo al mare.*" It resounded through the room.

"Dagobert, there it is, what mamma sang in Madam Godin's salon; here it is—here," and she threw the music up in the air. I observed that her brother did not answer and turned round. He was standing with his back to us, hanging over the writing-table. In a few rapid steps I stood beside him.

"You must not do that," I said. I was frightened at the sound of my own voice, it was so toneless and quivering. In spite of that, however, I looked him courageously in the face.

"Ah, what must I not do?" he demanded mockingly, at the same time letting fall his hands, in which he held an instrument.

"Break the lock," I replied. "It is my fault that you are here behind the seals. I guided you here. It is a grave fault, I am very well aware of that. More, however, must not be done—I will not allow it," I burst out as I saw him again raise his hand.

"Indeed?" he replied, laughing. It was strange, but his eyes wandered over me and kindled into light such as I had never yet seen in them. "And how will you prevent it, you little fragile, quicksilver creature?" he inquired, putting the instrument at once into the lock. I heard it creaking and cracking in it. Nervous, but at the same time angry, I seized his arm with both my hands and tried to pull him away. At that moment I was seized

round my waist and held tightly, while Dagobert whispered in my ear: "Little wild cat, don't touch me or look at me that way—it is dangerous for you. Your fascinating eyes undid me from the very first. Just your wild mischief attracts me, and if you try to hit me again, as you did on the stairs to-day, then it is all up with you—charming, slippery little lizard."

I screamed aloud and he let me go.

"What nonsense are you going on with there, Dagobert?" said Charlotte, hurrying over. "Leave the child alone, I beg. You must not play off any of your lieutenant's tricks on her. Lenore is under my protection, and there is an end of that. Moreover, the little innocent is quite right. What we find locked up here we have no business to open by force. And of what use would the documents be to us if we had to acknowledge that we had obtained them like rogues from behind those legal seals? They are even out of Uncle Eric's reach, on account of his having had the doors sealed, and we do not require to see them. As surely as I breathe, so surely do I know now that we were born here—that we are standing in our parents' house, on our own lawfully inherited territory," she said solemnly. "Do you hear? The storm is saying 'Amen.'"

Yes, there was a clap that made the very ground shake beneath our feet and which burst open the glass door that I had but slammed to, without properly shutting, when lately there, deluging the writing-table with rain in one moment.

"Ha! ha! it says amen and points out the way we should proceed at the same time," said Dagobert, laughing and shutting the door. "It does not touch this writing-table with a gloved hand—its motto is 'Might against might.' If matters are to go on as you and Eckhof advised, then I must go on begging every groschen from uncle and listening to his reproofs about my debts till my hair is gray; and you will grow an old maid in the same detested dependence."

"That I shall be in any case," she said, a slight pallor spreading over her face. "I would never marry beneath me. But these court fools, on the other hand, are detestable to me, so I will not love either—I will not. I have quite another object in view—I intend to become the head

of a chapter. There many a one who has trodden me down will come under my jurisdiction—let them take care of themselves. Besides, I don't understand you, Dagobert," she continued after taking a long breath. "We settled long ago that matters are not to be brought to a crisis till you return here in January; that we will meantime keep silence and collect all the evidence we can. I shall find it hard enough to hold out here alone. It costs me already the deepest self-control to look in uncle's face and to refrain from saying to him, 'Deceiver that you are!' and to associate with Fliedner, who always looks so peaceful and innocent while she is systematically helping to rob us—the wicked old cat! And I really liked her. It is almost too much for me, but it cannot be helped—it must be borne. Eckhof is right in exhorting us to the utmost possible care and caution."

She wiped the wet up off the table and closed the box fast again.

What she did or did not do, however, no longer attracted my attention. I had taken up my position between the glass door and the writing-table and stood sentry there. I fancied the shaking of the ground continued, but it was in my own feet. Never in all my life had I felt as I did at that moment, when I seemed suddenly as if in iron bands. Had I been cast down the darkest abyss I could not have felt more terrified than at the sound of that warm whisper from a half-stifled voice. The words, indeed, were but half-intelligible to me, yet they sent the blood to my cheeks and temples. Had I followed my own wish I should have left everything behind me and run off as far as my feet would carry me; but the fear that the writing-table might then, in spite of all, be broken open held me back.

"Those are our arms, little one—look at them," said Charlotte, at last coming over to me again. She held a signet ring with a cut stone in it toward me. "Papa, indeed, never wore rings, as her highness affirmed to-day. Nevertheless this one exists and has evidently been often used as a seal; it lay among papa's writing-materials. I will take it with me—the only thing I will claim beforehand."

She slipped the ring into her pocket. I was released. We went back and the press was pushed back into its place.

As the lawful heirs of Freiherr Lothar von Claudius, as indirect branches of the ducal house, did the brother and sister descend the gloomy staircase which Charlotte had ascended still under the torturing influence of doubt.

Clear as day lay the solution of the mystery there—to me also. How, then, could Herr Claudius with an open brow and firm voice have denied the truth? In spite of all, let the matter be as it might, I knew he had not told a lie.

XXV.

CHARLOTTE seized her shawl, but dropped it quickly again in alarm, and running to the window threw it open.

"What is the matter, Herr Eckhof?" she called out.

The old bookkeeper was running across the gravel path toward the house. He had no hat on, and his face, generally so self-controlled, was deeply agitated. He was evidently much excited.

"There has been a water-spout in Dorotheenthal," he replied breathlessly. "At least 40,000 thalers loss for the Firma Claudius! Everything that we have cherished and tended with so much care for years past out there is now ruined and destroyed! Do you hear the signals of distress? There must be people in danger too."

Dorotheenthal was a property belonging to the Claudius family, a very ancient and once noble mansion which, together with the village, lay at the foot of a somewhat narrow valley. The firm carried on its business much more extensively in the demesne of Dorotheenthal than in the gardens at K. The young plantations were entirely confined to that district, and the rare specimens of young pine trees which had been raised there had won for Dorotheenthal a degree of renown. Each peculiar species of flower was sown in fields there, and houses full of ananas, orchids, and cactuses surrounded the house in considerable numbers. A few small lakes and a pretty little river which ran through the valley assisted not a little in the carrying on of this gigantic concern. Now, however, the assistant element had turned into a destroying fiend. The lakes had overflowed and the river, bursting through a dam, had, as Eckhof had announced before he disappeared in the hall, united with them.

"What a misfortune!" exclaimed Charlotte, turning deadly pale and wringing her hands.

"Nonsense—what are you frightened at?" said Dago-berth, shrugging his shoulders. "What are 40,000 thalers to Uncle Eric? He can get over it—and in any case, what is it to us? That is his affair—our inheritance won't be a penny the less! No doubt he will make wry faces, and what I shall get at my departure the day after to-morrow will be little enough. Indeed, on my own account I should have been better pleased if the business had all been in good order."

The last words were almost lost upon us. Charlotte ran out and I after her. People in danger! How dreadful that sounded. I must know more. I could not remain in the Carolinenlust alone. Charlotte had given me her arm, and we ran thus over the foaming river, pelted without intermission by the rain, and through the now flooded, dripping garden to the front house.

Here and there we met garden assistants with terrified faces on the way, and in the distance we could already discern the noise of voices calling to each other as the sound came to us over the yard wall. Nearly all the work-people of the establishment were gathered together when we entered the yard, and Herr Claudius' carriage was standing at the door. He himself was just coming out equipped in a great-coat and hat in hand. It seemed as though a soothing power proceeded from his presence—the noise ceased. He gave some orders. His quiet, dignified movements were in no wise marred by any hurry or fuss. One felt that the fair head with the grave expression yonder would maintain the mastery in every situation in life.

On our appearance the people stepped back and let us pass. I was still hanging on Charlotte's arm. Just then Herr Claudius observed us crossing the yard. It seemed almost as if he started; a glance as of anger crossed his uncovered brow; he frowned and from beneath his knitted brow shot a look of slow, reproving disapprobation. I cast down my eyes and drew my arm away from that of my companion.

"Uncle Eric, that is a severe blow," exclaimed Charlotte, approaching him as he stood at the door.

"Yes," he replied simply, without any further observation. He then turned back into the hall, where Fräulein Fliedner was standing.

"My dear Fliedner, will you see that Fräulein von Sassen gets on dry clothes immediately? I make you responsible for it, mind!" he said in his ordinary calm manner, pointing at the same time to my dirty, wretchedly soaked-through satin shoes and my dripping frock. To my face he did not vouchsafe another glance.

He mounted the box rapidly and seized the reins.

"Take me with you to Dorotheenthal, uncle," said Dagobert, who appeared just then in company with the bookkeeper, now equipped in hat and cloak.

"There is no room, as you may see," replied Herr Claudius curtly, pointing to a number of workingmen who with anxious faces mounted after Eckhof. They came from Dorotheenthal.

The carriage rolled off, and Fräulein Fliedner, taking my hand, led me into her own room. Charlotte followed us.

"You are really like a drowned rat," said she to me as Fräulein Fliedner brought forward dry clothes. "It was most extraordinary that Uncle Eric, with his bartering mind, should at such a moment have observed it."

"You may infer from that that his mind is not given to bartering," replied Fräulein Fliedner. Her gentle face was still pale with terror, and now a bitter, harsh expression crossed her lips. "I have often begged you not to give expression to such hard and unjust remarks in my presence. I really cannot bear them."

"So—but you keep silence, and think it all right when my uncle reads me a lecture and in his cold, cruelly calm manner does not deal very gently with me," she exclaimed hotly. "If he were an old man, to whom respect was due, I could bear it better; but my pride rebels against this man, with his ardent eye, who possesses, in comparison with my brother and myself, not so much experience as superior power. He treats us badly!"

"That is not true," replied Fräulein Fliedner decidedly. "He only seeks to suppress those tendencies which he ought not to suffer. Of course when you act independently and indiscreetly you must be prepared to receive correction, Charlotte. Something occurred this very day which you might have avoided. While Herr Claudius was in the conservatory with the princess our house carpenter took the measure of every window in your apartments—he said you had ordered blinds."

"Well, yes, I did. I have borne the sun long enough and patiently shining in on my unfortunate skin," interrupted Charlotte sullenly. "There should be blinds on the sunny side——"

"Quite true; but it would have been nothing more than proper to have asked Herr Claudius about it. It is his house and his money you are thus disposing of."

"Well, the time will yet come when I shall no longer have to listen to the clanking of these chains," cried Charlotte, giving way to her passion.

"Who knows but that then you may one day long for them again?" said Fräulein Fliedner very quietly.

"Do you think so, my good Fliedner?" The mocking scorn in the young girl's voice sounded fearful. "A depressing prognostication! Nevertheless, I am so bold as to hope—indeed, to expect decidedly that Providence has better intentions with regard to me."

She walked toward the door.

"Won't you take tea with me?" asked Fräulein Fliedner as kindly and gently as though there had not been a bitter word exchanged. "I will prepare it at once. I am responsible for Fräulein von Sassen's health and must endeavor to avert all possibility of cold."

"No, thank you," replied Charlotte, looking back from the door and answering coldly. "I wish to be with my brother alone. Send me up the tea-pot, but the little silver one, if you please. I don't intend to use brass any longer, not even if Dörte makes it shine like gold. Adieu, princess!"

She slammed the door to and hastened upstairs with heavy steps. Almost immediately after harsh chords rang through the hitherto quiet house. The old lady shrank back.

"Oh, how inconsiderate," she murmured to herself. "Every note falls like a blow upon my anxious heart."

"I will go and beg of her to stop," I said, springing to the door.

"No, no, don't do that," she said, holding me back nervously. "That has become her habit when she leaves us in ill-temper, and we always allow her to vent it thus. But to-day, just at this time of anxiety and sorrow—what must the people in the house think? She seems much more heartless than she really is," she added in a grieved tone.

She settled me up deep in the sofa cushions and began to prepare the tea. At any other time it would have seemed unsociable enough in the old lady's old-fashioned apartment. The tea-kettle sang; outside the wind went sighing through the empty streets and the rain pattered in measured time against the window-panes. The quiet, smiling face in the pagoda behind the glass nodded contentedly into the darkening room, and the irritable little Pinscher lay lazily buried in evident comfort on the pillow. Still Fräulein Fliedner's hands trembled as she buttered the bread—I could see them—and Dörte, the old cook, who just then entered with a plate of baked bread, asked with an anxious sigh:

"How are things going on out there, Fräulein Fliedner?"

My heart beat with an inexplicable anxiety. I felt a burning pain every time it occurred to me that Herr Claudius had parted from me in anger, and to my own torment I was forced to think of it perpetually. How childishly willful and contradictory I must have appeared to him as I came over, leaning on Charlotte's arm. And notwithstanding all that he had still shown care for me—care for an insignificant little being like me at such a moment when he had just met with such a heavy misfortune! My teeth chattered softly, and with a nervous shudder I sank still deeper into the sofa corner. At Fräulein Fliedner's earnest request I swallowed a cup of hot tea. The old lady herself took nothing; she sat quietly by me.

"Is Herr Claudius also in danger out there?" at length burst from my lips.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I fear so. Dangerous it must be. Water is even worse than fire, and Herr Claudius is not the man to think of himself at such a moment; but he is in God's hand, my child."

That did nothing toward lightening my heart. How often had I read of people having been drowned, innocent people who had committed no crime—and he had a murder on his conscience! Was a murderer also in God's hand? The anxiety I suffered drove me involuntarily to speak out.

"But he is guilty of a man's death," I said in a suppressed voice without looking up. The old lady shrank

back, and for the first time I observed an expression of intense disgust flash from her soft eyes.

"Abominable! Who has told you that already and in such a reckless way?" she said in great excitement. She stood up and went over to the window for a few minutes; then she came back, sat down beside me, and took both my hands in hers.

"Do you know the circumstances about it?" she asked more composedly.

I shook my head.

"Then your young and inexperienced mind may well form a horrible picture out of it. I can easily fancy that. Poor Eric! It is indeed the darkest spot in his life; but, my child, he was a very young man at that time, scarcely twenty-one; a young man of a passionate and enthusiastic temperament. He loved a lady; loved her so—well, I cannot enter into the details of that with you. He had a friend, too, in whom he placed the most perfect confidence and for whom he had sacrificed much. One day he discovered beyond a doubt that the lady and his friend had both deceived him, that both were false. A violent scene took place and words passed which in men's opinion, according to the present horrible fashion, can only be wiped out in blood. They fought a duel about the treacherous woman. The friend——"

"Young Eckhof," I hastily broke in.

"Yes, the bookkeeper's son. A shot lodged in his shoulder and Herr Claudius' head was a good deal injured. The weakness in his eyes is a relic of that time. Eckhof's wound was not dangerous in itself, but his already enfeebled and shattered constitution gave way beneath the blow, and after a few weeks' confinement to a sick-bed he died, in spite of every effort on the part of the most celebrated surgeons——"

"And the lady—the lady?" I inquired eagerly.

"The lady, my dear child, had left Paris long before Herr Claudius rose from his sick-bed. She went away with an Englishman."

"She was the cause of his sufferings and never came to crave forgiveness or to nurse him?"

"My little girl, she was an actress. She took this sacrifice of life and health as the homage due to her dangerous charms, and felt in no wise called upon to ask forgiveness,

still less to heal the wound her cruelty had dealt. Not long after his recovery Herr Claudius came here—his brother was dead and had left many arrangements to be carried out by his heir. I saw him again after a long period of separation, and never in my life have I seen any one suffer like that poor young heart, torn up at its very foundations!”

“Had he remorse of conscience?”

“Not so much that. He could not forget the lady. He used to rush through the garden like one deranged or keep striking chords wildly on the piano.”

“The grave, quiet Herr Claudius?” I inquired, breathless with surprise.

“He wasn’t so then. He sought for calm and soothing in music, and how he played! I can easily understand how Charlotte’s ‘strumming’ must at times torment him. He did not remain long here. He wandered another year about the world without any object, and then he came back once more completely changed. He took his business in hand as the grave, silent, stern man you see him now. I have never heard him strike a note since, never heard a passionate word from his lips, never seen a violent action on his part. He had conquered in a different way to his brother, who sank under his affliction. His strong mind guided him to the real means of cure for mental anguish—work—so he became then just what he is now, a worker in the strictest sense of the word, a character of steel who sees in order and activity the healing waters for men’s minds and would willingly see them universally made use of.”

Fräulein Fliedner had spoken with an animation such as I had never yet seen in the old lady, who, though always sweet and amiable, was at the same time very reserved. I sat beside her, gazing with a beating heart into the new world which had been revealed to me. This passionate love of a man for a woman was a marvel to me. My greatest favorites among the fairy-tales lost all their charm and brilliancy when placed beside this narrative from real life. And that man who had been unable to forget the faithless lady, who had been chased through the garden like one demented by extreme agony for her loss—that man was Herr Claudius. He could really thus take a thing to heart!

"Does he love the lady still?" I inquired, breaking the sudden silence.

"My child, I cannot answer that," said the old lady, smiling. "Do you really think that anybody knows what goes on in Herr Claudius' mind? You know his face and form and you yourself call it grave and quiet; but his mind is a sealed book to every one. Besides, I can scarcely think it possible. He must now despise the lady."

It had grown dark. Fräulein Fliedner had opened a window previously; the heavy rain had ceased. It was very quiet in the retired Mauerstrasse, but in the distance we could hear the hum of people moving about in the crowded squares toward the center of the town. The lamps appeared on the opposite side of the street one by one. They were reflected in the dismal pools on the pavement and showed how dark and gloomy the sky still hung over the town. Their faint glimmer lighted even the room where we sat close to each other without uttering a word, and I begged Fräulein Fliedner not to light the lamps—there was light enough. The fact was I was afraid to see the old lady's face, for I knew it would look full of anxiety and deep distress.

Just then I heard steps on the footpath and a voice saying rapidly as it passed under the open window:

"A lame woman who was unable to save herself has been drowned. They say it is dreadful out there."

We started up, and Fräulein Fliedner began pacing up and down the room. We heard talking going on at the same time in the hall.

"Is there no news yet from Dorotheenthal?" inquired Charlotte over the banisters as Fräulein Fliedner opened the door.

"None of our people are back yet," replied old Erdmann. He was standing among the household servants, and his voice trembled as he spoke. "But other people say it is too awful out there, and our master was the first man to the rescue. God have mercy on him! Little he cares if the silver cord is to be loosed for him. Other people were there too—the duke, they say, among them."

"What, his highness himself?" called out Dagobert.

Erdmann replied in the affirmative. The door upstairs was slammed to, but immediately afterward the young lieutenant appeared on the stairs. He had his horse brought

out and galloped off, the young Tancred—how mean he seemed to me now.

I cowered once more in the corner of the sofa, while Fräulein Fliedner took up her place in a window, sighing deeply. I could not help thinking of the water raging over the earth and suffocating every one unable to save himself. How dreadful it must be to sink beneath the surging waters. But "Herr Claudius cares little if the silver cord be loosed for him." As old Erdmann had said, he no longer cared either for the world, mankind, or yet his own life; and he was right. The lady whom he could not forget had been false, the brother and sister and the old bookkeeper were all the same, and I to whom he had shown so much kindness had been but a few hours previously busily employed in bringing crushing proofs to light against him and his mode of acting. Fräulein Fliedner alone clung to him, and it was with a sensation of envy that I looked over at the small, delicate form which kept ceaseless watch at the window. She had a good conscience; she had never done anything to hurt him; she need not reproach herself if—if the waters were to close forever over that fair and noble head. I very nearly screamed aloud as I thought of this possibility, but I clinched my teeth and began once more to listen anxiously to every step, to the sound of every wheel.

Thus passed hour after hour. My father had not returned yet either. Erdmann had, by Fräulein Fliedner's order, gone over to the Carolinenlust to see. The excitement in the town had not yet quite subsided, but it had become considerably quieter. It was midnight when a carriage turned into the Mauerstrasse. With an exclamation half of alarm, half of joy, the old lady sprang up, and I flew through the hall and tore open the hall door. A palpable darkness lay over the earth, but heeding it not, I rushed forth to meet the approaching vehicle.

"Is it you yourself, Herr Claudius?" I called out in a trembling voice above the clatter of the wheels.

"Yes," sounded from the box.

"God be praised!"

I pressed my hands against my breast. I felt as though my now unburdened heart would burst its bounds.

And now the people of the house all came out and pressed around the carriage. Herr Claudius got down,

"Is it really so bad, sir?" asked Erdmann of Herr Claudius. "Really 40,000 thalers' loss, as Schäfer says?"

"The injury is greater. It is a wilderness once more. We must begin again from the beginning at Dorotheenthal. I am only sorry for my young pines—not one left!" he said, moved. "Well, all that can be remedied in time; but here——"

He stopped, opened the carriage door, and helped some one carefully down the steps. The light of several lamps now streamed through the yard gate and fell on a young girl, who, partially supported by Herr Claudius, stepped on the pavement. A spasmodic sob shook the tender bowed-down form, and her uncovered hair fell in disorder over a beautiful but agonized face, in which the sorrow of despair was visible.

"Her mother has been drowned," whispered those who had accompanied them.

Herr Claudius caught her more firmly and led her up the steps. He passed close to me in the dark. His clothes were wet through.

On the top step stood Fräulein Fliedner, stretching out her hands toward him; what he said I did not understand. A sudden shyness and inexplicable feeling of pain had made me shrink away from the other people, but I saw the old lady lay the weeping one's arm gently in her own and lead her away. Herr Claudius remained a few moments longer above, talking to Charlotte. It did not escape me that he looked searchingly around. Had he, then, recognized my voice in the yard, after all, and did he want to convince himself that it really had been me, with whom he was so angry? What absurd thoughts! He had something more important to think of now. How great the misfortunes he had witnessed to-day, and what weighty affairs now lay on his shoulders! Had he not just led an afflicted orphan girl into his house—led her in with tender care and deep sympathy? She was not ungrateful like me; she did not spurn the hand that sought to support her. Trustfully had she yielded herself to the arm that upheld her, and in the midst of all that was he to remember the willful haide child? Certainly not!

He came downstairs again, stood at the door, and gazed into the darkness. Meantime another gentleman had got out of the carriage, who went to meet him. I recognized

my father. In unspeakable amazement I beheld him offer his hand to the despised "Krämer" with the utmost cordiality and part from him with warm thanks. I joined him in the garden and slipped my hand into his arm. He was greatly surprised, and indeed could scarcely bring himself to believe that his little daughter could be up and in the open air at such an hour. He had accompanied the duke to Dorotheenthal, and then, for shortness, returned in Herr Claudius' carriage.

"What a man!" he exclaimed, standing still. "The duke is perfectly enchanted with his calm and quietude and with the dignity with which he meets such an enormous loss. I took the man for a mere arithmetical machine. I must beg his pardon for it."

Yes, what a man, indeed! "Well, all that can be repaired in time, but here——" In these few simple words had he placed his own enormous pecuniary loss in comparison with that of the young girl. And that was the niggardly uncle, the cold-blooded miser. No, no, "a worker in the strictest sense of the word," but not merely on account of the gain, but because he saw the means of his mind's healing in order and activity. Ah! I already began to understand him better.

That night I never went to bed. I sat down in a corner of the window and waited for the morning dawn. With that day, which rose so pale behind the trees, I would begin a new life.

XXVI.

THE following afternoon I took the garden gate key, which had been confided to me, and went over to the Swiss cottage. I knew that Gretchen's father was teacher at the first girls' school in K., and I intended him to be my assistant in becoming another person. No long introduction was requisite. Frau Helldorf recognized me again immediately, and as I learned later Schäfer, the gardener, had already related plenty of stories about the wild, singular, and so unexpected appearance of the "learned gentleman's" child. Gretchen threw her arms round my neck. The occurrence in the garden, which had been my fault, was not once mentioned.

"Will you instruct me?" I asked Herr Helldorf, who sat correcting an enormous pile of copy-books. "I will learn as much as it is possible to cram into my brains. I am already such a grown-up girl, and don't even know how to write."

He smiled and so did his charming little wife, and we forthwith entered into a compact, according to which I was to be free to come and go as a child of the house and to receive daily at least three hours of solid instruction. I informed Fräulein Fliedner of this compact. She expressed herself as thoroughly well satisfied with it, and also undertook at my request to arrange about the payment for my lessons, so that I was not obliged to appear in Herr Claudius' office.

From that time I was unwearied in my application. To be sure, the pen was often enough thrown under the table at the commencement, and I fled with burning temples and streaming eyes deep into the wood; but I always returned nevertheless, though heaving many a sigh, and picking up the small steel tyrant wrote on, till the copying gradually ceased and the firm fair characters began to flow rapidly over the paper and became the exponents of thought: then it seemed as if scales fell from my eyes! To my teacher's great joy I made incredibly rapid progress, and my very limited departments of instruction at the commencement now extended itself to music. Here my own natural taste came to my assistance, and I was soon able to stand by the younger Herr Helldorf at the piano and sing duets with him.

This intercourse at the Swiss cottage, which my father approved of and which Herr Claudius and Fräulein Fliedner openly encouraged, was looked upon in other quarters with enraged and jealous eyes. Eckhof was outrageous and Charlotte indignant and spiteful in a way I could not understand. I now learned more about the dispute between the old bookkeeper and his daughter. Helldorf had been a student of theology and was while yet a student engaged to Anna Eckhof. The old mystic had given his consent, but on condition that the young man should become a missionary when he had completed his studies—indeed, a missionary formally bound by a written confession of the Lutheran faith—and go out to the East Indies with his young wife. This clause became gradually more and

more oppressive to the young lover, and he finally declared himself utterly opposed to it and a decided enemy of all pietistical people and their phraseology. In addition to that, the doctor gave it as his opinion that the young girl's constitution was far too delicate to enable her to bear up against the exciting life of a missionary's wife, full too as it must be of privations. This, however, did not affect the old man in the least. He was fanatical enough to think that she would be supported with the requisite strength, and if not, she would go straight to her God as a true and faithful combatant for holy Church. He had thrown her off when Helldorf had remained steadfast in his refusal and she would not give up the man she had chosen.

I could perfectly well understand, then, the old man's ill-humor at the sudden breaking down of the partition wall between the banished one's home and the territory which he had hitherto appropriated to himself; but what gave rise to Charlotte's enmity against my intercourse with the schoolmaster's family? She repeatedly said to my very face that she could not understand how Herr Claudius could intrust the key of a door which opened on the high-road in such heedless, childish hands as mine—one fine day we should find the garden overrun with beggars. She maintained that I had become insufferably insolent since the Nürnberg channel of information had been opened to me; that not a trace of the "simple, charming haide princess" remained; and that I had begun all at once to arrange my curls with a degree of art betokening a striking tendency to coquetry. Still more enraged and embittered was she, however, when the music-lessons began. I often met her behind the garden wall when at the conclusion of the lesson I used to run in there quickly. With flashing eyes, but still always in an indifferent, injured manner, she remarked that the little songstress rejoiced in a very strong throat—she had caught a few notes in passing by; but one Sunday, when my fellow-singer, young Helldorf, accompanied me to the garden gate, she suddenly emerged from the thicket and uttered a peal of laughter, which she now and then interrupted with a scornful "Allow me to congratulate you, Fräulein von Sassen."

I let it pass, because I really did not understand her de-

meanor. Otherwise she commanded herself with regard to the impending secret far better than I had expected. In only two particulars did she allow the increase of her pride to be seen—in the circumstance of, to Fräulein Fliedner's great annoyance, never appearing at table except in rich silk and in her contempt for the burgher class. Young Helldorf was the person who felt that most, and Herr Claudius encouraged him more and more in coming to the house. She behaved with such coldness and rudeness to the young man that it often irritated me, and all the more because a purely fraternal affection had gradually sprung up between and united us in a very beautiful bond. To my great comfort he confronted her pride with equal hauteur. He completely ignored the haughty lady. I was often a witness of this, as I now very frequently joined the little circle at Herr Claudius' tea-table, and always accompanied, indeed, by my father. A tolerably frequent intercourse now took place between Herr Claudius and him. The former often came into the library, a thing he had never done formerly; and my father often went into the room arranged as an observatory. At tea they always sat by each other and seemed to understand each other very well, but they never—no matter when I happened to listen to them—touched on the subject of the medal. My position with regard to Herr Claudius was not altered in consequence of this intercourse. On the contrary, I kept myself more decidedly and anxiously out of his way than ever; that secret with which I was acquainted stood between us. At Dagobert's return in January they were to take the opportunity for a disclosure. Were I in the mean time to seem friendly or even to court his notice, how false I should then seem when his eyes were once opened. And yet another thing made me shrink from his presence. Often, when I was engaged in conversation with others, if I suddenly looked up I met his eye fixed upon me in a kind of melancholy. I knew too well why—he saw the lie that stained my youthful brow. That brought the blood to my cheek and wakened up anew the hideous stubbornness of evil. He took my repulsive demeanor as something which he had never expected to be different. He never alluded to the guardianship with which I had intrusted him, although I was well aware that he kept incessant watch over my

every act, and had actually put himself privately in connection with the teacher whom I had myself selected. He kept his promise to Ilse faithfully, irksome and burdensome as it must in time have become. A sudden terror often overcame me as I looked at him surrounded by his guests, he himself seated in their midst in his own gentle gravity and calm bearing, and then saw the impending secret hanging over his head in the air. How would he come out of all these discoveries?

Three months passed thus. I looked with pride at the firm, fine characters of my own handwriting, into which I could now infuse mind also. I had already entered into a correspondence, and that a secret one, with my Aunt Christine. She had thanked me for sending her the money in almost exaggerated language, and informed me that she had put herself into the hands of a physician at Dresden, who gave her every hope that her voice should be restored. According to her assurances I had saved her, had been her guardian angel, and was the only being that still had sympathy with a poor, deeply tried woman. She again expressed the strongest desire to be able some time or other to embrace me. This correspondence terrified me in the highest degree, especially since I had ventured timidly one day to mention this unfortunate aunt to my father. He started up and forbade me ever to do so again, remarking at the same time angrily that he could not understand how Ilse could have allowed such a piece of family misfortune to reach my ears. Her ever more and more frequent letters caused me consequently the deepest anxiety; still, I could not find it in my heart to leave them unnoticed.

But other cares also came upon me. I, who but a few months previously did not even know what money was, now counted every penny with anxiety, for they were sorely wanted. I had undertaken to manage our little household with no small pleasure, and also not without some cleverness. Every evening I arranged a pretty little tea-table in the library, a comfort my father had not experienced for many a long day; but that this must all be paid for I was utterly ignorant till the maid one day brought me a long bill for the outlay.

"Money?" exclaimed my father, looking up from his papers in alarm as I unsuspectingly handed him the bill.

"My child, I don't understand—what for, then?" He searched in his waistcoat pockets and in his coat. "I have none, Lorchén," he explained, shrugging his shoulders and in his helpless embarrassment. "How is it, then—haven't I paid the subscription to the hotel quite lately?"

"Yes, papa, but this is for the little outlay on supper," I stammered.

"Ah, so." He pulled his hair with both hands. "Yes, my child, that is something quite new to me. I never took any—there," he said, searching in his pocket for a paper containing sugar-stick, "that is very nourishing and wholesome."

Oh, how I started and how my eyes were opened all at once!

My father had a considerable income, but denied himself things absolutely necessary for the sake of his collections. Hence that awfully emaciated face, which under Ilse's care and mine had already begun to assume a more healthy appearance. Even if I had wished it, I dared not for his own sake have consented to this singular sugar diet; but the courage failed me entirely to come forward now with any further request when I saw that he would give hundreds for some discolored manuscript or majolica vase, and never think whether it left him a farthing remaining. His gentle, lovable nature, the almost child-like delight with which he showed me his newly acquired treasures, and the deep respect I felt for his knowledge and vocation, all tended to keep my mouth shut.

I sought out the little purse which Ilse had left in the trunk "in case of necessity" and which I had hitherto overlooked. Its contents sufficed for a time, but now, with the last penny, care came once more. I dare not apply to Ilse with a request of that nature, nor to Herr Claudius either. I should be obliged to tell him on every occasion to what purpose the money I thus drew was to be devoted. I also remembered, now that I was becoming a better judge of mankind and of circumstances, that he had sternly reprobated these very collections as soon as any such taste degenerated into a passion. I understood his expression that "such collectors would take the very bread from off the altar" much better now, and dared not expect, therefore, that he would yield to my request. But over what I myself might earn he would have no right. I

should not even need to tell him to what the proceeds were applied. This idea came like a ray of light to my deliverance.

The very day after the accident at Dorotheenthal I had seen the young girl, whose mother had been drowned there, sitting at one of the windows in the back room. Her pretty, pale face was bent so low and her fingers were so busy that I could not succeed in catching a glimpse of her.

"What is she doing?" I had inquired of Fräulein Fliedner.

"She asked for occupation, because she thinks that only in that way will she be able to master her sorrow. She writes the names on the seed packets. Her father was a schoolmaster in Dorotheenthal and she writes beautifully."

This occurred to me again when one day Emma, the housemaid, brought me a long list of what I owed once more. I had not another farthing to dispose of and begged a few days' grace from her. Evidently surprised and perplexed, she left the room, and at six o'clock in the evening I went with a beating heart toward the front house. It was Herr Claudius' evening for receiving at tea. My father was also invited, but first he was in attendance at the castle for the purpose of welcoming the Princess Margaret, who had returned that day after an absence of three months.

I left my cloak and hood in Fräulein Fliedner's room.

"My child," said the old lady, looking a little embarrassed and drawing my head to her breast, "if your cash-box should ever run out you will come to me, will you not?"

I started. Emma had been talking, but I would not confess my embarrassment at that moment, at all events. I felt ashamed for my father's sake. And how would it help me, either, even were she to lend me the money? It must be repaid all the same. So I thanked her warmly and proceeded with tolerably steady steps toward the office for the first time since Ilse left.

As I approached I could hear Herr Claudius walking up and down. As I opened the door he turned round at the noise and stood with his hands folded behind him. His was the only table on which there was a lamp burning,

and on it there was a green shade; all the other gentlemen had left the office.

A shudder ran through me. The tall, slight man there had just been pacing up and down the room with hasty strides, and I could not help thinking of the days when a passionate sorrow had made him pace about the garden so restlessly. My appearance in the office seemed to astonish him greatly. Almost involuntarily he caught the lamp shade and raised it, so as to throw its whole light on my shy, hesitating person as I stood in the doorway. I felt as much pain as if I had suddenly been placed in the pillory; but I gathered all my energies together, walked up to him, and with a slight and very unsuccessful bow laid a paper on the writing-table before him.

"Will you be so kind as to examine this handwriting?" I said, with downcast eyes.

He took up the paper.

"Nice, characteristic writing. The characters are firm and steady, look almost as if they were harnessed there, and are yet not wanting in elegance," he said as with a slight smile he turned his face toward me. "One would think the writer had drawn on an iron glove in order to mask a delicate white little hand."

"Then they are nice; but are they useful too? I should be glad of it," I said nervously.

"Ah, so you have a deeper interest in it than I thought. You wrote that yourself?"

"Yes."

"And what do you mean by useful? Is it not enough that you can all at once write so nicely and—one can see it in the writing—so rapidly and with so much ease?"

"Oh, no, not nearly," I replied in haste. "I want to write so that—that I might be intrusted with work." It was out now and I began to take courage. "I know, too, that you allow women to write the names upon the packets of seeds. Will you try me? I will take the greatest trouble and write it exactly after the pattern."

I looked up at him, but let my eyes fall again instantly—his blue eyes were fixed with such an ardent yet sympathetic gaze on my face. They were so glowing with such animation it was impossible to believe that they belonged to that ordinarily calm, self-possessed being.

"You want to work for money?" he asked in his usual

quiet, almost business-like tone. "Did it not occur to you that you do not require to do that? You have means—tell me how much you want and for what purpose."

He laid his hand on the iron safe which stood near him.

"No, I won't have that," I answered hastily. "Let that money remain for future days. My dear grandmother said it would suffice to keep away want, and I am not in want yet—God forbid!"

He let his hand drop. I don't know why, but his peculiar smile made me fancy he had also heard already of Emma's chattering. This made me feel deeply cast down, but at the same time strengthened me in my resolution.

"You have evidently a false idea of the work you want to undertake," he continued. "I know that in five minutes your cheeks would flush, and the thoughts in your head and your feet beneath the table would rebel against the detested writing."

"That is different now," I interposed in a faint voice and feeling dreadfully ashamed. He was quoting my own childish words, in which I had formerly described my horror of writing. "I have found it difficult enough, that is true, I don't deny it; nevertheless I have conquered."

"Really?" That fatal smile again trembled on his lips. "Then you have completely thrown aside all the haide propensities? You have forsworn climbing of trees and can no longer understand that you ever took pleasure in wading through the river?"

"Oh, no; so cultivated as that I certainly am not," broke forth from me against my will. "And indeed, I cannot think the time will ever come when I could listen to the rustling of the trees and the murmur of the waters without a yearning—but I shall learn to govern that longing, as I did to form these characters, with clinched teeth"—I pointed to the paper—"also against my inclination."

He turned away and looked up at the green curtain as though he were counting every thread. He then took up a little paper packet and held it toward me. In graceful, powerful characters was written there: "Rosa Damascena."

"Reflect now. You would have to write that four hundred times, over and over again," he impressively said.

"Good—you shall see I can do it! It is the name of a flower, and if I must write the word 'Rose' a thousand times, I shall always think at the same time of its delicious perfume. A rose's calyx has always been a marvel to me. I have always looked upon it as the palace of beetles—that is one of my 'haide propensities' too. Will you trust me with the work now?"

He remained silent, and now I began to fear that he had raised all these difficulties because he did not wish to say directly that my mode of writing would not answer. Deeply humiliated, I thought of Louisa, the teacher's orphan. She was still in the house, and her clever, active hands were become quite remarkable. She no doubt did the thing far better than I could, and it was very daring of me to compare myself with her. Oh, how bitterly I repented having gone into the office! Not without a strong ebullition of the old refractoriness did I seize upon my sample of writing and put it in my pocket.

"I feel that I have been acting too forwardly and formed a much too exalted idea of my accomplishments," I said, breathing hard. "Now that I see that beautiful, graceful handwriting"—and I pointed to the paper packet—"I feel ashamed."

I walked rapidly toward the door, but he had reached it before me.

"Do not leave me thus," he said in his gentlest tones. "I am acting foolishly. You are beginning to give me a proof of the faintest possible dawn of confidence, and I gainsay you. But I cannot consent to your undergoing a martyrdom which your whole nature rebels against. You told me yourself that you accomplished that mechanically and with clinched teeth. I do not wish, either, that your hand, which has hitherto been unsullied by the touch of money and its accompanying curse, should be wearied for the sake of a few pence—the seventeen-year-old human marvel that had never seen money! Did you think it passed by me, then, like a new scene, or a strange national costume, or anything of that kind? I explained to you at the beginning that the overgrown rebellious element in your nature must be curbed—unruliness disfigures a woman in my eyes, though thousands may regard it as a kind of wild grace—but your individuality must not be injured in the process."

"Well, I am undertaking the curbing of it in proposing to work hard and unweariedly," I replied obstinately. "I know that others seek healing in labor. You yourself are busy from morning till night and exact the same from those around you."

He smiled.

"I exact from each—and rightly so—the strictest diligence in his vocation; but do you imagine I am such an ingrained lover of work that I would knead everybody and everything into one and the same mold? One who lops the superfluous branches of the trees off I allow to do as he will; but I can scold him severely if he dare to touch with his rude finger one of the tender blossoms or rub the bloom from off the velvety leaves. I should dearly like to see the willful shake of that curly head somewhat gentler; but only by means of attaining mental superiority, never under the palsyng yoke of mechanical labor."

I saw now that I was on the point of losing my only prospect of earning anything, because, do what I would, I could not resume the business tone which he himself had entirely laid aside. Every word he uttered sounded as repressed and hushed as though he feared any raising of his voice might light a flame within which would lead on to passion. Could some word have escaped which recalled to his memory the faithless lady? Moved by an inexplicable sense of passionate pain and sympathy for one who had once suffered so much, I seized the only remaining way—entreaty. I begged and implored in such ardent tones that I was myself surprised.

A flash of light, like sunshine, spread over his face.

"Well, then, you shall have what you wish," he said in a thrilling voice after a moment's reflection. "Now I understand how it was that even the rough, stern Frau Ilse could do so little with the 'haide princess!' No, no, we have not done quite so quickly yet," he exclaimed as, after a few words of thanks, I was about to leave the room. "It is only just now that I should make a request, is it not? Don't be frightened. I will not ask you to shake hands"—how bitter and humiliating that assurance sounded to me—"I will only ask you to answer me one question truly."

I turned back and looked up at him.

"Was I mistaken or was it really your voice which called

me the night I returned after the accident at Dorotheenthal?"

I felt the burning color spread over my face, but replied without hesitation:

"Yes, it was I. I was afraid——"

I stopped, for the door opened and Erdmann entered. With an expression of the most profound annoyance Herr Claudius pointed to a packet of letters to be taken to the post. The old man had a letter in his hand, which he laid upon the table and then proceeded to fill a bag slung around him with the others.

"From Fräulein Charlotte," he said as he noticed the evident surprise with which his master looked at the seal of the letter he had brought with him.

"That letter will not go till early to-morrow morning, Erdmann," said Herr Claudius curtly, taking it to himself.

During this conversation I had reached the door, and before he could call me back again I was standing in the hall with a beating heart. I breathed once more—the bear of an old man had come just at the right moment. In an instant more I should have allowed Herr Claudius to induce me to confess all I had suffered that evening about him. What did it mean? The ground gave way beneath my feet; the old gentleman in the blue spectacles! All at once this phantom of the past had disappeared, and all that had made such a deep impression on me in the new world seemed as nothing when compared with the striking appearance of the "Krämer."

XXVII.

I RAN upstairs to the sitting-rooms. Three, communicating with one another and surrounding Charlotte's, were always comfortably warmed and lighted. The doors all stood wide open, and Herr Claudius liked when conversing to be able now and then to pace their entire length. The circle that assembled round the tea-table was a very small one. A few old gentlemen, so-called respectable people, and a few friends of old times came now and then; but my father—and as a matter of course his "daisy"

too—with young Helldorf were regular guests. Louisa, too, the young orphan and silent needlewoman, was also present. On the other hand, the old bookkeeper had excused himself once for all by saying he was growing old and wished to avoid passing through the garden on cold and foggy evenings. In reality, however, he had openly declared that the house of Claudius had assumed such a doubtful aspect that he at all events had determined to wash his hands of it, and take no part in that for which the present owner would one day have to answer to his predecessors.

On this occasion the rooms were still empty. It was a cold November evening. The first light flakes of snow were mingling with a close, fine rain, which hung over the earth like a heavy cloud, and gusts of wind moaned through the streets.

I found Fräulein Fliedner handling the clattering cups and saucers as I entered the parlor. The old lady was somewhat excited, for the china was slipping through her fingers in quite a confused manner. Charlotte was watching her with a malicious smile. She had thrown herself into a corner of the sofa and was half-smothered in the glittering folds of a green silk dress which was overloaded with flounces and puffings. The striking style of her beauty fascinated me afresh; her splendid figure showed off to such advantage in the warm, soft cushions; at the same time the contrast between her bare neck and arms and the chilly November wind outside made me shiver a little. The voluptuous beauty was covered only with a mass of very transparent lace.

“For pity’s sake, my dear Fliedner, do be cautious,” she exclaimed, with an affectation of nervousness, but without changing her comfortable, careless attitude in the slightest degree. “The late Frau Claudius would turn in her grave if she knew how you are using all her porcelain mementos of christenings and family reunions and I know not what other hallowing recollections which may hang round them. The matter is not worth speaking of. What are you thus annoyed about? Can I help this Louisa being odious to me? And is it my fault that this weeping-willow face always looks as if she was asking forgiveness from God and man that she is in existence? The girl is instinctively conscious of what I say out unaf-

fectedly—she doesn't suit in the parlor with her school-mistress manners. This is a piece of uncle's humanity, which he carries too far in thus bringing her into a position for which she is wholly unsuited. Dear me, I am no savage either, but there is a propriety! Good-evening, princess."

She held out her hand and drew me down on the sofa beside her.

"Sit quiet there now, child, and don't be gliding perpetually about the room like a will-o'-the-wisp," said she imperiously. "Otherwise uncle will be giving me a neighbor who provokes me with her eternal muslin stitching and coarse steel thimble."

"One of these intolerable evils you can easily remedy," said Fräulein Fliedner very quietly. "Give Louisa one of your silver thimbles—you never use them."

"Very seldom, at all events," laughed Charlotte, holding up her long white fingers. "I know why, too. Do you see these nails, my best of Fliedners? They are not very small, but rosy and blamelessly elegant—on each of them stands the patent of nobility. Don't you think so?"

She drew up her upper lip in a peculiar manner and, laughing impertinently, showed the whole row of her fine white teeth.

"No, most decidedly I do not think so," replied Fräulein Fliedner excitedly, the flush of anger rising to her cheek. "Nature gives no such patent in opposition to labor, nor does a few words written by a prince, the result of which, according to some foolish people, is all at once to turn honest red into bad blue blood. Such princely words even have not the power to release any individual from the work to which mankind is properly called. It would be wrong and a contradiction in the Almighty's mode of acting if rulers were really given the power to sanction laziness. I must, however, on this occasion remind you of one thing. Up to this moment it has never crossed my lips, but your arrogance no longer knows any bounds; it becomes every hour more and more intolerable, and therefore I must say to you: Don't forget that you are an adopted child."

"Oh, yes, just such a poor creature, eating the bread of kindness. Isn't that it, my good Fliedner?" exclaimed Charlotte, fixing her sparkling eyes on the old lady's face

scornfully. "And just think, that doesn't cause me much pain, not so much as that," and she filiped her fingers together. "It tastes most excellent because I cannot rid myself of the belief that it belongs to me by the rights of God and man. Besides, what I wrote to Dagobert to-day is perfectly true, that since Eckhof fell out of favor you play the first fiddle at the tea-table. You are growing impertinent, my good Fliedner."

She stopped all at once and looked over the old lady's head at the door, where Herr Claudius had made his appearance noiselessly. Not in the least put out, she rose and greeted him. Curtly returning her salutation, he walked at once over to the table, holding the seal of the letter which he had intercepted in the office up to the lamp.

"How do you come by these arms, Charlotte?" he said quietly, but with perceptible sharpness in his tone.

She was frightened. I saw it in the slight twitch of her half-closed eyelids, from which she had previously affected to inspect the arms with indifference. "How come I by them, uncle?" she repeated, shrugging her shoulders almost playfully. "I am very sorry, but I can give you no explanation about that."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Did I not speak distinctly enough, Uncle Eric? Well, then, at this moment I am not in a position to tell you how I came by this pretty little seal. I too have my little secrets, of which not a few are to be found in the old Claudius house. I have not stolen it; neither have I bought it; nor has it been made a present to me, either."

So far did she venture to play ball with this fatal riddle in the very face of that extreme gravity.

"The intellectual solution is that you have found it, although I cannot think where," he said, evidently disgusted with her pert way and manner of jesting with him. "I have not the least intention of inquiring further—keep your secret. I ask you therefore instead: How do you come to use these arms?"

"Because—well, because I like it."

"Ah, so—that is an amazing view of *meum* and *tuum*! These arms are indeed extinct, and personally I am wholly wanting in respect for the fictitious halo which surrounds such a tiny shield. I might no doubt allow you the child-

ish pleasure of continuing to seal your letters with this little crowned eagle if you were not Charlotte, but one never puts cards in the hands of a notorious gambler whom one wishes to cure, and I here forbid you once for all to use in future this little seal which you have found."

"Uncle, I ask you in return if you really have the right to forbid me?" she said in uncontrollable passion. I trembled with fear and excitement. She was on the very point of disclosing the plot at one blow.

Herr Claudius stepped back and measured her with a haughty look of astonishment.

"You dare to doubt it?" He was angry, but retained outwardly perfect self-control. "On the day when you—you and your brother—left Madam Godin's house with me this right became mine. I gave you the name of Claudius, and no law in the world can gainsay me if I insist that you shall bear it without any modification. Has the moment really come when I shall be forced to rue having spread this valued jewel of my fathers as a shield over your and Dagobert's head? My brother injured it in having united this folly"—he pointed to the ring—"with it; with my consent it shall never be revived!"

A mocking smile crossed Charlotte's features; he observed it and knit his brows.

"A childishly weak and diseased mind in such a powerful form," he said, running his eye over the young girl's imposing form. "You complain and grumble at the arrogance of the nobility, and yet help to strengthen it like thousands of similar foolish creatures by the eagerness you show to belong to their circle, by servile submission where you are only endured. I am not one of those fanatical opponents of the nobility who long to tear them from their pedestal. Let them stay there. But I will also maintain my position. The significance of their place in the world is, besides, quite different. If I do not make myself its slave I am not one. Its imaginary strength only takes root in your weakness: where there is no adoration there will be no idols."

Charlotte threw herself once more into the sofa corner. It evidently cost her a tremendous effort to curb her tongue.

"But how can I help my nature?" she exclaimed, not without scorn. "Be it even so—I cannot help it. I be-

long to those 'foolish creatures.' Why should I deny it? If this charming little crowned eagle really belonged to my own family name I should be proud of it—proud beyond measure!"

"Well, it is ordained that trees shall not grow so high as heaven. Woe to them who should be obliged to live with you did this fancied superiority of birth really belong to you. Happily, neither your own name nor that of your adoption justifies——"

"My own name? What is that like, Uncle Eric?"

She raised herself involuntarily and fixed her glowing eyes steadfastly and piercingly upon his face.

"Have you really forgotten it—it which sounds a thousand times sweeter in your ears than the coarse German, worthless name of Claudius? It is Méricourt."

It was evident that he uttered the name with an effort.

Charlotte sank back again in the pillows and pressed her handkerchief to her lips.

"Is tea ready, my dear Fliedner?" said Herr Claudius, turning to the old lady, who, like myself, had sat listening breathlessly to the dangerous conversation. While he drew a chair for himself to the table, she poured out the tea rapidly. Her delicate little hands were somewhat unsteady as she handed him the cup and with a look of anxiety shyly scanned his clouded brow. And this old lady was his partner in guilt; this gentle, lovable, kind old lady the sharer of a perpetual dark iniquity—never! Herr Claudius had once more involved the strange circumstances in the deepest mystery by his last firm and decided answer. I believed him. Charlotte thought otherwise. I read in her face that her conviction was immovable. She sat like a princess beside me and allowed Fräulein Fliedner to tend her, and the mocking smile which still lingered on her lips was at the name of Méricourt. What a contradiction was this haughty soul itself! Once upon a time, in the supposition that her name was the French one, she had rejected with scorn the idea that the plebeian blood of the Claudiuses ran in her veins; and now she threw it away like a cast-off dress at the discovery that she really was a Claudius, the veritable niece of the despised "Krämer." Ah, I, the harmless child of the haide, was utterly at a loss to understand how a few magic words from a prince, a few scratches of his pen, sufficed

to cleave the old stock of the mercantile house to its very root and turn the severed branch into such new nobility as to be unrecognizable! Just then Louisa came in, and after her Helldorf. I drew a long breath, as though a fresh and reviving element had come in. These two had not the faintest suspicion on what a volcano the peaceful-looking tea-table stood, but they recklessly broke up the deep silence which had prevailed ever since Herr Claudius had spoken last. I always felt, too, in Helldorf's vicinity a sense of protection, a home-like, familiar tie. Had I not gradually become the petted, cherished child of his brother's house?

He gave me a white paper with a meaning smile and careful fingers. I knew what it contained—a just-opening tea-rose which Frau Helldorf had long been nursing for me and which she had told me that morning I should receive at the tea-table if in the course of the day the bud should open. I uttered a cry of delight as I opened the paper. Thick, white, and toward the center a pale yellow, the heavily perfumed blossom swayed upon its stem.

“Oh, pray take a little care of my dress, Louisa; you are tearing off the flounces!” exclaimed Charlotte, at that moment angrily drawing the rustling folds of her dress toward her. She was very angry, but I could not believe it was on account of her dress; a tear in her richest dress was always a matter of great indifference to her. I had often seen her increase with her own hands the three-cornered tear a thorn-bush had made in a beautiful lace handkerchief because it looked so ridiculous, and she had pulled Fräulein Fliedner's Pinscher by the ears because he had torn the trimming of a new dress with such charming mischief.

Louisa drew back frightened, looked up with terrified eyes, and stammered forth an apology. Although the expected injury did not appear, one could not fail to observe the terror with which the imperious young lady inspired the depressed, timid young creature. It was a painful scene and would certainly have ended unpleasantly for Charlotte had not Fräulein Fliedner come to the rescue.

Giving one rapid glance at Herr Claudius' ominously knitted brow, she seized the rose and fastened it in my hair.

"You look splendid, my little brunette," she said, patting me on the cheek kindly.

Charlotte buried herself more deeply than ever in her corner; her long lashes lay upon her burning cheek as though she slept; she did not vouchsafe a single glance to the adornment of my hair.

In spite of the inclemency of the weather some more guests dropped in. An animated discussion then arose, and Charlotte roused herself from her apparent apathy. The temptation to show off her brilliant conversational powers was one she could not resist. Her genius seemed to sparkle with unwonted brilliancy on that occasion; I had never before seen her so animated. Her mocking laughter often mingled unpleasantly in it, indeed, and the wanton air with which she threw her voluptuous form about, the unreserved play of her round white shoulders, the looseness of her robe, which disclosed somewhat too fully for maiden modesty the splendid female bust—all seemed as though every fiber were alive with electricity, as if it were fire, not blood, which flowed through her veins.

With a mingled feeling of horror and admiration my gaze seemed riveted on her, when all at once a hand passed over my eyes, as though to forbid the sight. It was Herr Claudius, who sat next me. Immediately after he asked Helldorf to sing. His unmistakable object in asking the young man to sing, that of shutting up the witty red lips yonder even for a few moments, did not succeed. Charlotte continued speaking, though perhaps in a lower tone, just as though she had no idea that Schubert's "Wanderer" was being sung over at the piano with touching power.

"If you do not care for music yourself, Charlotte, at least do not spoil the enjoyment of others," said Herr Claudius authoritatively as he signed with his hand that silence must be observed.

She shrank back and ceased talking. She leaned her head back on one of the sofa cushions with an air of proud indifference, and began playing with one of the long, thick curls which hung down on her neck. She never once looked up as the young man returned into the room and received the lively thanks of everybody present.

One of the gentlemen, however, begged her to sing a duet with Helldorf.

"No, not to-day. I am not inclined for it," she said in a careless tone without changing her position, without even looking up.

I saw Helldorf's handsome face grow pale to his very lips. I felt so deeply grieved for him. I could not endure that a member of the family I had become so tenderly attached to should be offended. I rose courageously.

"I will sing the duet with you, if you like," I said to him, and my voice quivered, for it seemed to me as though I were doing something amazing, something perfectly superhuman.

And he knew that—he knew my timidity before strangers. With a rapid motion he raised my hand to his lips and led me to the piano.

I don't think I ever sang in all my life so well or with so much expression as on that evening. A powerful, if incomprehensible, excitement enabled me to overcome the nervousness which obscured the first few notes. One by one every one present had stolen noiselessly up to us, and at the close we were overwhelmed with applause. I was more especially called a lark, a flute, and I know not what all, by the old gentlemen.

Then came Charlotte too. She rushed up to me and put her arm round my waist. I was frightened at her. She bent low enough over me to hide the sparkling tears which stood in her eyes; but they were tears of anger, which with tightly compressed lips and heaving bosom she was endeavoring with all her might to suppress. Had I but known then in the very faintest manner the nature of the passion which so fearfully excited her, how easily could I have calmed her, how willingly would I have done so! As it was, however, an inexpressible sense of anxiety oppressed me and I made an effort to escape from her clasp.

"Now just look at the haide lark!" she laughed aloud. "With one single grasp you could crush the little songstress"—she tightened her arm round me so that I gasped for breath—"and she quavers till the walls tremble."

Before I was aware of it she had drawn me away into a more secluded part of the room, to all appearance coaxing and caressing me. Suddenly she brushed her hand violently over my head and the rose flew into the center of the next room.

"Charming little coquette, you have played your part to perfection! Who could have believed that such a dangerous element lay hidden in the barefooted maiden?" she whispered with carefully suppressed voice in my ear. "And do you know what is done with those who are thus celebrated?" she exclaimed louder. "People raise them high above the common herd—thus, thus—you feather, you charming nothing!"

Suddenly I felt myself raised from the ground so high that I could have touched the ceiling, which in the upper story at the front house was not very lofty. In the powerful arms of this young girl I was, indeed, but as a morsel of down floating about—a powerless being with helpless infant hands, a veritable nothing! Even over my voice I had lost all power; shame and terror had choked me. I felt as if I were in a mad woman's power.

Laughing, she flew through the room with me, while I involuntarily closed my eyes. A sudden blow on my head aroused me—we had run against the heavy bronze luster, which hung very low in the furthest-off room. I uttered a trembling cry and the company came running in, while my "bearer" let me down, considerably alarmed. I just saw as through a mist that Herr Claudius took me in his arms, and then darkness fell upon me.

How long this insensibility lasted I know not, but it seemed to me that I gradually awoke much in the same way that I had done so often on Ilse's lap when I was a child. I felt myself gently supported, and now and then a whispered breath which I knew not, and which yet sounded so exactly like Ilse's pet names for me which, properly speaking, I was never intended to hear. But the heart against which I leaned was beating violently—that was quite a different one to Ilse's. Startled, I opened my eyes and gazed into a face flushed with a passionate anxiety such as I can never forget.

Suddenly I understood the position I was in and turned away my face, coloring, but at the motion my head began to pain me. The arm which had been supporting me was immediately withdrawn, and Herr Claudius, who had been sitting on the sofa by me, sprang up.

"Oh, my dear, sweet child—God be praised, there are your large eyes once more!" exclaimed Fräulein Fleidner in a trembling voice. She was just in the act of wringing out a linen cloth in a china plate.

I put up my hand to feel my head. It was bound up and the cold water was trickling down on my left temple from the bandage. Quicker than I could have imagined did I once more gain the mastery over my nerves and that strange, unknown feeling which for one short moment had thrilled my soul with such indescribable sweetness and joy. I thought of Charlotte and the severe rebuke she was sure to receive with deep anxiety. As soon as possible I must be upon my feet again, well and whole.

"What have I been doing?" I inquired, raising myself energetically.

"You have been in a slight faint, darling," said Fräulein Fliedner, evidently delighted at my cheerfulness.

"What! have I been such a weak creature? Oh, if Ilse only knew that! She can't endure ladies with weak nerves. But we will take off this cloth, Fräulein Fliedner. It really is not necessary," I said, putting up my hand. "Oh, my rose!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"You shall have it again," said Herr Claudius, looking cast down. I saw his bosom heave as with a sigh. He went into the adjoining room and took up the rose, which still lay there on the floor.

"I must do it honor; Frau Helldorf has been nursing it so long for me. We have watched every leaf as it grew," I said, looking up at him as he gave it into my hand.

These few words produced a strange effect. The melancholy which had hung on Herr Claudius' brow disappeared entirely at them, the curtains yonder rustled, and Charlotte, who up to that moment had sought the shade of the window niche, now came forward. She advanced toward me and threw herself on her knees.

"Princess," she said in soft beseeching tones, stretching out her hands to me, begging forgiveness.

Herr Claudius stepped between us. I trembled. Never yet had I seen those great blue eyes light up with such ungovernable fury.

"You shall not touch her with the tip of your finger—never again. I shall know how to guard her in future from you," he said, pushing away her hand. How remorselessly severe and stern that quiet, composed voice could sound.

Fräulein Fliedner moved forward in alarm and looked

anxiously into his face. For the first time for years past passion again broke forth, the barriers of a sternly exercised and unexampled self-control broke down. The old lady closed the room door noiselessly; the gentlemen were still in Charlotte's room.

"I repent—bitterly repent the moment in which I sought to lead you by my guidance into a purer atmosphere," he continued in the same tone. "I have drawn water in a sieve. Nature won't change, and the wild blood in your veins——"

"Say rather 'the proud,' uncle," she said, rising from the ground. She was as pale as death, and her head thrown back on her shoulders looked statuesque in its quiet scorn.

"Proud?" he repeated, with a bitter smile. "Tell me, how are you wont to exhibit this beautiful ornament of woman, and why? Perhaps just now, when devoid of all womanliness or dignity, you exhibited yourself in the light of an unbridled bacchante."

She drew back as if he had struck her in the face.

"And what else do you call proud?" he continued. "Your unseemly hankering after rank and position? Your way and manner of acting toward people who, in your opinion, are far beneath you? With that same heartless manner you are constantly annoying me bitterly and seriously shaking the rotten foundation on which you stand. Beware!"

"Of what, Uncle Eric?" she broke in coolly and with a mocking expression on her lips. "Have not my brother and I already experienced every form of oppression? Is there really another side to our tolerably high-tuned souls which you have not already sought out with a severe hand and pronounced as opposed to and incapable of union with what I may call practical home-baked life? Do you not always seek to stifle our ideal wherever you can?"

"Yes, as poisonous stuff, as imaginary dreams which have nothing to do with the morality or development of the human mind. You, ignoble in the very depths of your soul! You have not even a spark of gratitude!"

"I would thank you for the bread I have eaten if I had not more to demand from you," she burst out.

"For pity's sake, be silent, Charlotte," said Fräulein Fliedner, seizing her arm. She shook the old lady off angrily.

Herr Claudius, dumb with amazement, measured the young girl's haughtily posed figure from head to foot.

"And what do you demand?" he then asked in the same tone of perfect calm as of old.

"Light upon my birth before everything."

"You wish to know the real truth?"

"Yes. I am not afraid of it," she exclaimed, with a kind of triumph.

He turned his back on her and paced the room a few times. The silence was so death-like I fancied I could hear the beating of the excited pulses.

"No, not now—not now, when you have just offended and annoyed me so deeply. It would be an ignoble revenge," he said at last, pausing opposite to her. He raised his arm and pointed toward the door. "Go. Never were you less fitted to learn the truth than at this moment."

"I knew it," she laughed aloud, and rushed out into the corridor.

Fräulein Fliedner laid a fresh bandage round my head with trembling hands and then went across to see after the gentlemen again.

My heart beat. I was alone with Herr Claudius. He sat down on a chair beside me.

"That was a stormy scene, ill-suited to these frightened eyes, from which I long above all things to keep all evil impressions," he said in an unsteady voice. "You have seen me give way to violence. How sorry I am for that. The little confidence you showed in me to-day will no doubt be all gone now. I can imagine that."

I shook my head.

"No?" he asked, and his clouded brow cleared up. "A flame is easily kindled in my brain. I know it and have always carefully kept it down—only to-day when I heard your cry and saw the blood streaming down your pale face."

He stood up and paced the room, as though the very remembrance of it was too much for him. His eyes scanned the ceiling of the room and the old-fashioned luster.

"The evil old house!" he said, standing still. "An evil spirit hovers over these old walls and their furniture. I begin to understand the building of the Carolinenlust—

and old Eberhard Claudius. My beautiful grandmother drooped like a flower within these walls. Those ordinary, quiet-hearted housekeepers from choice, of whom enough have borne sway here, found it a quiet, peaceful home, but an idolized, beloved woman has always found the house dangerous."

His voice thrilled through me. No doubt he had spoken in just that tone to the faithless one. How was it possible that she had notwithstanding left him?

"Your childish instinct taught you to shrink at once from the cold, dark front house," he continued, again seating himself near me.

"Yes, that was at first," I interrupted him eagerly, "when I came from the haide and every wall seemed to me a cellar—that was very childish. It is not light in the Dierkhof, either. There are old dismal panes enough there, through which the sun never shines, and it is cold and gloomy in the barn, no matter how warm the sun may shine outside in the haide. No, I like the old front house now and look at it with quite different eyes, and ever since I have read about Augsburg and the Fuggers I always fancy the ladies with the veiled foreheads will come down from their frames and meet me in the passages or on the stairs."

"Oh, that is poetry with which the haide princess used to invest the bleak, barren haide too. You make the old mercantile house endurable to yourself with it and fly to the Carolinenlust for refuge."

"No—it is still dearer and more home-like here. Was there, then, nobody in the front house whom your beautiful great-grandmother loved?"

What could I have said that made him start back thus and look at me as if petrified?

The door opened and Fräulein Fliedner entered accompanied by the doctor; just after, my father arrived. At first he was very anxious about my accident, but the physician declared there was not the slightest cause for alarm. One of my curls fell under the scissors, then a fresh bandage was applied, and I was forbidden to venture again into the night air. I slept for the first time, watched by Fräulein Fliedner, in the front house, and through my light feverish dreams I saw one small form. She wore the veil belonging to the females of the old Claudius house

and walked about the passages and stairs, but her feet never touched the cold stone; it was all strewn with the garden blossoms, and the little being—I felt it under a strange blissful sensation—was myself.

XXVIII.

THE next morning, with the first pale ray of sunshine, fled all these fond delusions as a matter of course. I felt ashamed and yet could scarce tell why. Fräulein Fliedner protested energetically, but all in vain. I sprang out of bed, dressed myself rapidly, though with trembling hands, and ran to the Carolinenlust. I flew from the front house, but it was no longer possible to escape the quick eye before which I had once so trembled, and, strange to say, Herr Claudius, who had hitherto opposed a grave and quiet front to my repulsive bearing and observed a highly reserved demeanor, did not retreat one hair's-breadth from the position he had assumed that evening. He had once taken me in his protecting arms, and it seemed now as though that were to endure to all eternity. My shy flight when he approached, my downcast eyes whenever he spoke to me, my silence when in his presence—all was of no avail. He continued to address me in the same tender tones he had once begun, and his beaming, happy brow showed no fear. He held me fast without touching me, and the promise he had made of protecting me was true in every sense. He was almost more in the observatory than in his office. There were no more tea evenings in the front house, but instead Herr Claudius was often present at our little tea-table in the library, and while the wintry storm raged without round the corners and the green curtains, unfastened from their loops, blew about in the room, my father often gave one of his celebrated lectures in presence of his two companions at the tea-table. Herr Claudius always listened with the deepest attention. Now and then some objection would fall from his lips and the speaker draw back in amazement, for it was new and original and supported by an amount of knowledge which in the "Krämer" he would least of all have expected to meet with.

Our agreement relative to my performances in the writing line had also been put in practice. I received my work through Fräulein Fliedner and joyfully delivered it back again through her hands, unspeakably amazed at the extraordinary amount of money a person could earn by writing; for care never troubled me again, and yet I always had a nice little residue to dispose of.

What a change! I felt myself caught and fast bound to another soul beyond hope of rescue, and yet no longer envied the little bird which could wing its flight all unfettered over my native haide. On the contrary, I could have shouted aloud to all the four winds of heaven that I was a prisoner; and, indeed, I should almost have liked to run my head against one of the trees, to feel but once again the joy of seeing how my other self suffered with me. For the sake of that one I forgot myself and the whole world besides, and even the fact that I bore two sins upon my conscience—that of a lie and the secret complicity in a secret so closely touching him. How did I then “fall from all my bliss” when Charlotte’s voice resounded in my ear or her unmistakable appearance crossed my vision. She observed, indeed, a strict reserve toward me now. The day after the stormy evening she had come into my room.

“I will not touch you with the tip of my finger, nor even let a breath from my lips approach you,” she had called from the doorway bitterly. “I only want to make peace with you, princess. Forgive me for what I did to you.”

I had sprung toward her instantly and, much touched, seized her hand.

“Did you see how I yesterday put our tyrant to the top of his bent? He is lost. I wander about the house with closed lips and a heavy heart. Every morsel I eat nearly chokes me with rage and inward disgust; but I will endure it. I must watch over our precious treasure in the writing-table—I dare not leave till Dagobert comes. Oh, how I shall shout for joy when at last I shake off the trammels of the shop forever and set foot on the floor of my parents’ house!”

At this passionate outbreak I had let her hand drop and stepped backward. Since that time we had seldom met alone; only when I came back in one of the court carriages

from the princess, she generally met me in the yard and accompanied me through the garden, and I had to relate and report every particular. Soon after her visit at Claudius' house the princess had fallen ill of a rheumatic attack and had been obliged to leave K. to undergo a speedy course of treatment. During her absence I, of course, never went to the court; but now I had to appear there twice every week, and those were the only occasions on which Herr Claudius went about with a deeply clouded brow.

Thus passed week after week in alternations of happiness and heart-breaking anxiety, of inward strife and again blessed peace, and now the end of January was approaching and with it Dagobert. A mortal terror seized me as I heard that the lieutenant had arrived, bag and baggage—the dreaded moment seemed to be so near, in all its depth of darkness and gigantic might; and yet I felt that one rapid, decisive, if painful blow would be far preferable to this state of hope and fear. Let the crisis be what it might, it would free me at all events from my unholy participation in the matter, and give me leave to confess my folly with sincere repentance.

Those were troubled days to me, for another burden weighed upon my mind—my father appeared to me all of a sudden strangely altered. His whole manner and bearing reminded me of the time when the purchase of the medal had been in question. He ate nothing, and I could hear him wandering about restlessly at night. A strange inundation of letters from all directions overwhelmed him, and every fresh one that he opened increased the feverish flush upon his sunken cheek. He wrote incessantly, but not at the manuscript which treated of the discoveries in the Carolinenlust—it lay untouched on the writing-table. I strained my ears to catch the words he continually kept muttering to himself as he paced up and down the room, but I could not understand a word and I did not venture to ask, lest I might have excited his impatience.

Never shall I forget those hours, when his suppressed uneasiness at last broke forth. It was one of those dreary, dark winter afternoons which hang like lead over the earth and mankind. My father had retired to his own room after dinner and taken with him the newspapers which had just come in. A few minutes afterward I heard him spring up

inside; he slammed the door violently and rushed up to the library. Anxiously did I follow him.

"Father!" I cried imploringly and threw my arms round him as he rushed past me without even seeing me.

I must have looked greatly terrified, for he ran both his hands through his hair and visibly made a great effort to be calm.

"It is nothing, Lorchén," he said huskily. "Go downstairs again, my child. People lie—they grudge your father his renown. They know that they are giving him his death-blow when they dispute his authority, and now they are coming in a mass and each with a stone in his hand. Yes, stone him, stone him! He has enjoyed distinction too long already!"

Suddenly he stopped and looked over my head toward the door. A lady had entered noiselessly; a very tall person in a velvet cloak and ermine collar. She threw back a white veil and disclosed—oh, what beauty! I thought involuntarily on Snow-white. Eyes black as sloes, snow-white forehead, and cheeks on which lay a soft rosy hue.

My father stared at her in amazement, while she advanced toward us with hesitating steps. A faint smile played around her mouth, and a roguish twinkle lurked in the glance she gave my father. It looked enchanting, almost child-like, and yet I thought behind that innocent demeanor an anxious heart must be beating, for the cherry-colored lips occasionally twitched with nervous excitement.

"He does not know me," she said in pleasing tones as my father continued silent. "I must remind him of the days when we played together in the garden at Hanover, and the elder sister galloped round and round as Wilibald's horse, and many a time felt the lash of his whip. Do you still remember it?"

My father drew back as though he saw the claws of a monster appearing from under the beautiful lady's velvet mantle. With one freezing glance he measured her from head to foot. Never could I have supposed that this man with his undecided, absent ways could have been capable of displaying such repulsive severity and coldness.

"I cannot believe it possible," he said sternly, "that Christine Wolf, who once indeed lived in my father Herr von Sassen's house, dares to cross my threshold."

"Wilibald——"

"I must beg to be excused," he interrupted her, raising his hand to keep her off. "We have nothing to do with each other! Were you only one who had erred and through the invincible love of art been tempted to leave your paternal roof, I should at once receive you; but with a thief I will hold no communication."

"Oh, Heaven!" She clasped her hands together and looked mournfully upward. I could not comprehend how he was able to withstand that Madonna glance, though the word "thief" had gone through me like an electric shock. "Wilibald, have pity. Do not judge a youthful error so severely," she entreated. "Could I begin that ardently longed-for career with empty hands? My mother would not allow me a single farthing, that you know, and it was so little, such a mere trifle, I asked of that rich woman——"

"Only 12,000 thalers, which you took out of her tight-locked secretary——"

"Had I not a right to it? Tell me."

"And also to the diamonds of the Baroness Hanke, who was just then our guest. They disappeared entirely with you, and my mother replaced them at the heaviest sacrifice to preserve our house from public scandal."

"Lies—all lies!" she shrieked out.

"Go away, Lorchén. This is no fitting place for you," said my father, leading me to the door.

"No, don't go away, my sweet child. Take pity on me and help me to convince him of my innocence. You are Lenore! Oh, what sweet, happy eyes!"

She took me in her arms and kissed my eyelids. The soft velvet-mantle fell over me; a delicious scent of violets seemed to exhale from her bosom and intoxicated me completely.

My father tore me away from her sternly.

"Don't delude my innocent child," he exclaimed angrily and led me out.

I went downstairs and crouched on the lowest step quite stunned. And so that was my Aunt Christine—"the skeleton in the family" as Ilse called her, "the star" as she had styled herself. And a star she was, this marvelously beautiful woman. Everything I had hitherto seen of female loveliness paled before the youthful aspect and

exquisite complexion of my aunt's face. How heavy and luxuriant did her black locks show off against the white ermine! How beautiful was her polished brow, in which at the temples one could observe the course of the delicate blue veins! And that soft, coaxing voice was there once more: the treatment had proved effectual! The slender hands which had held me so gently and drawn me with such tenderness to her breast—they had stolen! No, no; the anger my aunt had shown at the accusation completely disproved it. Had I not seen tears glistening in her eyes?

With beating heart I listened to the conversation in the library. I could not catch a syllable nor did it last long. The door opened. "May God forgive you," I heard my aunt say, and then her dress came rustling down the stairs, her steps became slower and slower, and suddenly she leaned against the wall and covered her eyes. I sprang up the steps and seized her hand.

"Aunt Christine," I called out, deeply agitated.

She let her hand fall slowly and gazed at me with a melancholy smile.

"My little angel, light of my eyes, you don't believe that I am a robber, do you?" said she, stroking my chin softly. "The wicked, wicked people, how they have hunted me with their slanders all my life! What have I not had to endure! And in what a frightful position am I now, when your stern father inexorably refuses to receive me. Child, I have no roof to cover me, no pillow whereon to lay my head. I have reached K. with the last penny in my pocket—I wanted to see you, you, my little Lenore. Oh for a shelter even for a few days; then I could arrange something for my own assistance."

That was a painful position for me. I would have given her up my own bed at once and slept on the ground, so deeply was I caught with this lady's charms; but against my father's wish I could not venture to keep her in the house. I thought of Fräulein Fliedner; she was so good and ready to help any one, perhaps she could advise me. Oh, all my fine resolutions, according to which I had intended hereafter first to reflect and then to act, where had they all fled to?

Without another word I led my aunt downstairs and out across the gravel walk—she followed me as submissively as a child. Just as we were about to turn into the bosquet

we came upon the brother and sister; Charlotte in a rich white satin bonnet and velvet mantle thrown over her shoulders. They were evidently going to take a walk.

I had not yet seen "the young lieutenant," for I had studiously avoided him, though he had sought me for days in the Carolinenlust. Now I felt afraid of him and in my inmost soul shrank from him. He also seemed surprised. His brown eyes, of which I had a horror ever since the explosion that day in the *bel-étage*, were fixed on me with a peculiar expression. I made as though I did not see the hand he offered me with a smile and introduced my aunt to Charlotte. I noticed, with no small astonishment, that a strong emotion passed like a flash of lightning over the unfortunate lady's face; she seemed about to speak, but not a sound escaped her lips.

Charlotte bent her head slightly and measured the person standing before her with rather a haughty glance.

"Fräulein Fliedner will scarcely be able to assist you," she said coldly to me as I explained my intention in a few words. "We have very little room in the front house. If you take my advice you will apply to your friends the Helldorfs—they no doubt have a little room you could take your aunt to."

I turned away disgusted and my aunt hastily drew down her veil.

Just at that moment Schäfer, the gardener, passed and saluted us. The Swiss cottage was his property, and I knew that he often let the so-called best room of his late wife to strangers. I ran after him and inquired about it. He was quite ready to take my aunt in on the spot, and begged her to accompany him at once; everything was "in the neatest order."

Without casting another glance at the brother and sister she followed the old man, who spoke to her in his kind, gentle way and conducted her to the gate of which I had the key. Was it that some inward excitement drove her on? Schäfer could scarcely keep pace with her, and in spite of every exertion on my part I was left a considerable way behind.

"For pity's sake, shake yourself free of this aunt," said Charlotte, running after me. "She will do you no credit—the paint is inch deep on her face; and then this imitation ermine. *Fi donc!* Child, you have singular relations

—a grandmother a born Jewess, and now this out-and-out actress! Apropos, don't be too late this evening. Uncle Eric is, contrary to all expectations, going to spend a nice sum of money; the conservatory is going to be brilliantly illuminated. May it be for his good!"

She laughed aloud and took Dagobert's arm, who was standing looking after my aunt with an inquiring eye.

"I don't know—I—must have seen that woman before," he said, putting his hand up in reflection to his head. "Heaven knows where."

"Oh, that is very conceivable. You have seen her on the stage," said Charlotte, drawing him on impatiently.

Deeply annoyed, I looked after them. Poor aunt! She was, indeed, an unfortunate woman, hunted by all mankind, and her beauty, the only thing that still remained to her, was that to be called—painted?

I thought the little room into which Schäfer conducted us was a thoroughly pretty and nice one. The old man had lighted a fire in the stove in the space of a few minutes and filled the window-sill with pots of roses and mignonne.

"Low and narrow," said my aunt, raising her arm as though about to touch the snow-white ceiling. "I am not accustomed to that, but I will manage to get on. One can bear everything with a good will, can one not, my little angel?"

She threw off her bonnet and cloak and stood before me in a velvet dress of royal blue. The splendid garment was indeed faded and worn at the seams and elbows, but it clothed a form like a sylph. The small train completed the truly regal aspect of her whole appearance, and from the low-cut bodice peeped forth Snow-white's gleaming bosom. And what hair! It waved round her forehead and fell in long curls down her back and bosom, and yet the richest plaits were coiled round her delicately shaped head. How it sustained this fabulous splendor I could not understand, still less that she could move it about so easily.

This unconcealed admiration she read, no doubt, written on my face.

"Well, little Lenore, are you pleased with your aunt?" she said, with a roguish smile.

"Oh, you are too lovely," I exclaimed enthusiastically.

"And so young—so young. How is that possible? You are three years older than my father."

"Silly thing, there is no occasion to scream that to all the four winds of heaven," she said, with a forced laugh, laying her soft hand on my mouth.

Her eyes scanned the small apartment and finally rested on a little looking-glass hanging on the wall.

"Oh, that won't do, that really won't do," she exclaimed in a horrified tone. "One can scarcely see the tip of one's nose in this fragment. How could I make my toilet? I am no peasant woman, child. I have been accustomed to live like a princess. One may give in for once in many things, but that I cannot. You will get me a proper glass, won't you? that I may have something a little more as I am accustomed to. Yonder in that castle you are inhabiting at present there is no doubt a superfluous mirror. Child—in confidence—every attention you pay me in this hour of temporary distress shall be amply repaid you hereafter. Let what I require for my convenience be quietly brought over. I will answer for it."

"How can I do that, aunt?" I replied, quite stunned. "The furniture in our rooms belongs to Herr Claudius." She smiled.

"I should not like to place a chair other than as I found it," I continued, gravely remonstrating. "Out of the Carolinenlust I cannot possibly procure you anything, but perhaps Frau Helldorf can give you what you require. We will see."

I felt more than ever cast down as I saw the unfavorable glance with which the little woman received my handsome, decorated *protégée*. It was of no avail that my aunt addressed all manner of pretty speeches to her in the sweetest voice and called the two children that were playing in the room angels. My friend's delicate face lost nothing of its cold and suspicious reserve, and as I finally ventured on the request about the glass, she became like a statue, took her only one of tolerable size from the wall, gave it to the handsome lady, and said with undisguised mockery:

"I can manage without it."

"Be cautious, Lenore, I beg you. I will watch too," she whispered to me in the front room as the blue velvet dress disappeared up the stairs.

Very much dejected, I laid my purse upon the table. In return, I received a kiss and the assurance that "all my little sacrifices" would in a short time be repaid a thousandfold. Then, however, my aunt devoted herself to the task of placing the looking-glass in the best possible light, and I returned to the Carolinenlust with a double weight upon my heart.

XXIX.

THE evening twilight was stealing in when I again entered the library. My father was wandering about the quiet chamber of antiquities amid all the pale, motionless forms, and did not again allude to his cast-off sister by a syllable. He may have thought she was gone forever, would never cross his path again, and that the sooner I forgot the circumstance the better. Shivering, I wrapped my shawl more closely round me. It was bitterly cold in the large, fireless room, and a light fall of snow enveloped the skylight outside.

"You will catch cold here, papa," I said, taking his hand. It burned like a coal; and how his eyes glowed in the sunken sockets!

"Catch cold? It is delightful here. It is just as if a cool bandage had been bound round my head."

"But it is very late," I replied, hesitating, "and you must arrange your dress a little. I think you have forgotten that the princess is coming again to-day to see the large conservatory illuminated."

"Ah, what have I to do with the conservatory?" he exclaimed impatiently. "Do you want to set me mad with the lights and perfumes of the flowers, which always affect the nerves of my brain? Nothing, nothing. What do I care for the princess or the duke either?"

His violent motions and the way in which he threw his arms about knocked down a lovely little statue from its pedestal, and, strange to say, he who never touched these "antiques" except in the gentlest and most careful manner scarcely noticed the mischief he had done, and allowed the little goddess to lie there unobserved. Terribly alarmed, I essayed to soothe him.

"Just as you like, papa," I replied. "I will send over to the other house at once and excuse our ~~absence~~"

"No, no. You must go, at all events, Lorchén," he interrupted me in a calmer tone. "I wish you to do so on account of the princess, who is fond of you, and I also wish to spend this evening alone."

He went into the library again and made as though he were busy at his writing-table. I shut the doors, stirred up the fire in the stove, and arranged the tea-table; then I went downstairs and with a beating heart began to dress myself; that is to say, I took the pearls my grandmother had given me for the first time again out of their case and twined them among my curls. The glittering beads shone amid my dark hair with almost fabulous brilliancy, and with far more striking effect than when I had worn them round my neck—that was just what I wished. Who could tell when the princess would be seen in the Claudius conservatory again!

It was late when I at last crossed over the bridge and approached the conservatory. I stood for one moment dazzled. The last rays of the waning light shone faintly from the fleecy clouds above me; the frozen snow crackled ankle-deep beneath my feet; and wherever I turned mine eye the trees and bushes, laden heavily with snow, stretched forth their specter-like branches toward me. Yonder the magnificent palm trees were towering in lofty grace above the wilderness of cactuses and ferns and the green patches of velvet sward between, while in the midst rose the fountain, falling in silver spray around. Bathed in the hidden light of the gas-jets, the green melted into a thousand shades, from the tender evanescent hue of spring to that of the darkest pine. The conservatory lay in the midst of the pale field of snow like an emerald rosette on white velvet.

"Ah, good-evening, my little one," said the princess as I advanced toward her. She was sitting in the center of a group of ferns, in the self-same spot where I had told my grandmother's story. Herr Claudius was standing somewhat on one side of her chair talking to her, while her suit and the brother and sister had arranged themselves in careless groups on either side. "Haide princess, you come forth just like a water-sprite," she said, jesting. "One would think you had just stepped out of the fountain. Child, do not you really know what a costly treasure you are wearing so carelessly in those rich wild tresses of yours?"

"Yes, your highness, I do know. These pearls are the remnant of a great property," I replied, endeavoring with all my might to steady my voice and give it a calm, ringing tone. "My poor grandmother said, when at her desire they were tied round my neck, that they had witnessed much domestic happiness, which, however, had fled before the persecutions and martyrdoms which Christian intolerance had heaped upon the Jews; for my dear grandmother was a Jewess, your highness, a Jacobsohn of Hanover by birth."

I had uttered the last words with marked emphasis in a loud voice and looked up at the same time at Herr Claudius. What did I care that Herr von Wismar hemmed in embarrassment and glanced shyly at the princess, while Fräulein von Wildenspring made a gesture of triumph, as though she wished to say: "Was I not right when my aristocratic nose scented the burgher element in this little mortal?" What did I care that the handsome Tancred bit his lip fiercely and with a gesture of disdain whispered some words in Charlotte's ear? Did I not see the start of joy with which Herr Claudius' face shone? I almost thought he was going to stretch his hands out to me and draw me to his strong, proud heart, because I had overcome my false shame, because to win back his respect I had bravely faced the disdain of the aristocratic party.

"Ah, that is indeed a very piquante discovery," exclaimed the princess merrily and perfectly unembarrassed. "Now I know how my little favorite comes by this thoroughly Oriental profile. Yes, no doubt it was just such a raven-tressed maiden, with just such quicksilver feet, that persuaded Herod to give her John the Baptist's head. The next time you come to me I should like to hear more about your interesting grandmother. Do you hear me, child?" She wound the string of pearls still tighter in my hair and twined her fingers gently in it. "I am sincerely fond of this little Rebecca," she said, "with her pure child's mind and little chattering tongue," she added with deep fervor as she bent down and kissed me.

Ah, my chattering had not been altogether harmless on this occasion, as he whose glance never left me knew too well.

The princess drew me down on a little stool at her feet, and there I remained, silent but attentive, till Fräulein

Fliedner came and announced that everything in the front house was ready. The royal lady had begged a cup of tea might be prepared for her in the interesting old house. Her sufferings from rheumatism forbade her remaining too long in the moist warm atmosphere of the conservatory. She wrapped her fur round her, and taking Herr Claudius' arm preceded the gayly chatting party through the snow-clad garden. The accompaniment of a lantern-bearer was not necessary. The clouds in the sky had dispersed and the light shone though the moaning poplars, throwing fantastic shadows on the snow. The moon rose.

I crossed the bridge once more and looked up at the windows of the library. The curtains were not yet drawn. The lamp on my father's writing-table was burning quietly, and in the opposite corner of the great dark room, near the stove, where the supper-table was laid, I saw a pale-blue flame flickering—it was the spirit-lamp under the tea-kettle. That looked comfortable. Still further I slipped into the house, up the stairs, and listened at the door; my father was no doubt writing. Completely reassured, I returned to the front house.

On that day the old familiar spirits of the Firma Claudius must have hidden themselves in some corner. Such an illumination would never have been allowed by the noble old merchants, even at the christening of a future chief.

"What on earth has come over the master to-day, Fräulein Fliedner? He can't have light enough," grumbled old Erdmann in amazement and laying a ladder against the wall of the upper corridor as I came up the stairs. "I must actually hang up here the two great lamps from the business premises."

"Let it be so, Erdmann," said Fräulein Fliedner, who just then came out of the saloon—a real flood of light streamed from within. "I am delighted that the light is breaking forth once more in the old Claudius house."

She stroked my hair with a gentle meaning smile and passed on into the hall.

That smile brought the blood to my cheeks. I let my hand fall timidly as I was about to open the door. I felt as though I could not possibly face the blaze of the countless wax-lights just at that moment. I went into Charlotte's room. It was empty. Two lamps burned on the

open piano and the clatter of cups and saucers was audible from the saloon, where the handsome Lothar's portrait was, as well as the sound of speaking. I was still standing there thinking how I could make my entry so as to attract least attention, when I heard a rustling in the next room and Charlotte entered, accompanied by her brother.

"The princess wishes to hear me sing," said she, tossing over her notes. "How did you get in here and where did you hide yourself till now, little one? You were missed yonder."

"I was anxious about my father and went to see after him. He is not well."

"Not well," laughed Dagobert softly, already seated at the piano, preluding. "Oh, yes, a very bad and serious indisposition is his! I heard this interesting piece of news at the club already. Nothing else was spoken of, and the cry of delight is running through the town like wildfire that this archæological mania is now on its last legs. In a short time we shall have a new style of things here, Charlotte. Thank Heaven, one is not called on any longer to break their jaws with Grecian, Roman, and Egyptian gibberish—it was hard enough." He ran up and down the keys with both hands, breaking into brilliant runs, while I stood paralyzed with the shock. "And just at the moment when your papa's position is shaken you select with such delicious *naïveté* to relate that he is descended directly from the Jews. That will complete his downfall."

"Yes, that was a little blunder. Don't take it ill if I say so," said Charlotte, laying a piece of music on the piano. "I don't want you just to tell a lie—I wouldn't do that myself; but under such circumstances one can observe a middle path—one can keep silence."

Dagobert began the accompaniment and immediately after Charlotte's powerful voice was heard.

What had happened? All that the handsome Tancred had been saying had sounded so obscure, accompanied as it was by his own careless and mocking laughter, interspersed with innumerable trills and cadences. I looked at the wretch with indescribable bitterness. He had termed my father's work "the archæological mania;" he who had bored the renowned man as his subservient "familiar" and often enough been a grievous trouble. This much I understood, that my father's position at court was shaken,

and that the cowardly plotters, who had formerly been among his flatterers, were now turning against him in his fall.

The princess had never been so kind or so affectionate to me as on that evening, and yet I could not bring myself at that moment to approach her again. I slipped into the adjoining room and hid myself in a dark corner, while Charlotte's powerful voice sang on. From my position I could overlook the tea-table quite well. The princess sat sideways under Lothar's picture, not in accordance with her own wish certainly, for I saw her frequent but furtive efforts to get a full look at the portrait. On her left sat Herr Claudius. One glance at that calm and noble face soothed my angry, anxious heart. What radiance shone this evening on his brow! The splendid head of the soldier as it hung above it with its expression of soul may have had handsomer features and a more strikingly ardent expression, but of what use had all his warrior's courage been to him? He had not been able to engage in the struggle of life. The wicked self-destroyer had fallen, while the calm, resigned one yonder had seized the half-torn rudder with one powerful effort and thus saved himself.

"You have a fine voice, Fräulein Claudius," said the princess when Charlotte returned to the tea-table at the conclusion of her song. "It reminds me, especially in the middle tones, of my sister Sidonie's *mezzo soprano*. Your animated, ardent delivery, too, reminds me of by-gone days. My sister preferred wild and original compositions to the simple ballad."

"If your highness will allow me, I will sing such a wild and original melody," replied Charlotte quickly. "I delight in the Tarantella—it intoxicates me. '*Già la luna—*'"

"I beg you will not sing the Tarantella, Charlotte," interrupted Herr Claudius, with quiet gravity. His voice did not falter, but a deadly pallor overspread his face and he frowned portentously.

"You are quite right, Herr Claudius," said the princess eagerly. "I share your antipathy. This Tarantella was completely the rage in my day—it was the stalking-horse of every professional singer; and Sidonie, too, to my annoyance, was passionately fond of singing it. Its style

is too bacchanalian for my taste." She pushed away her cup and rose. "I think we will set out now on a voyage of discoveries," she said, smiling. "I want to examine this singular old-fashioned establishment thoroughly for once. It seems to me as if I were reading out of some very old book every time I raise my eyes. Herr von Wismar, do you see that magnificent stag's head yonder?" She pointed to the most distant of the long range of apartments. "There is something to please you!"

The chamberlain immediately wandered off and the young lady with him. Her highness wished to be alone. Just at this moment Charlotte turned her head, so that I had a full view of her face. At sight of those strained features, that flickering restlessness and passion in the eyes, I knew at once that the young girl had decided on effecting her object, if possible, that evening. Just now, indeed, she was dutifully following the two court puppets by her brother's side to the deer's head so imperiously pointed out by the noble lady, while the princess remained alone in the small room adjoining the saloon, apparently intensely interested in the sufferings of Genoveva as depicted in the splendid coloring of the old tapestry.

"Do you know where Fräulein von Sassen is, Fräulein Fliedner?" inquired Herr Clandius, who was just entering the room where I was.

"Here I am, Herr Clandius," I replied, rising.

"Ah, my little heroine!" he said, coming rapidly toward me and forgetting that others around us would notice this unwonted animation in his voice and movements. Fräulein Fliedner drew back at once and busied herself at the tea-table.

"You have buried yourself in the very darkest corner to-day, just when I wished to flood my haide princess with all the light the old house could yield," he said in a suppressed voice. "Do you know, too, that in these precious hours I have been celebrating a kind of second birth? I was very young indeed when I condemned myself to walk in the discreet paths of age for evermore. Roughly and ruthlessly I quenched the springs of youth in my heart—I didn't want to be young any longer—and now, when in reality I am no longer so, these same springs have broken forth once more and demand their rights, their ancient and inalienable rights—and I have yielded to them. I

am indescribably happy at feeling myself young once more, as though that precious gem within my breast had remained untouched either by time or unfortunate experiences. Is not that foolish of 'the old, the dead old man' you first saw in the haide?"

My head sank upon my breast, which was heaving with agitation. The anxiety about my father, dread of Charlotte's doings, the people by whom we were surrounded—all, all fled before the soft tones half-whispered in my ear, and he, with his piercing glance, no doubt he read what was passing within.

"Lenore," said he, bending over me, "we will fancy we two are totally alone in the old mercantile house and have nothing to do with all those over there." He pointed to the other room. "I know for whom your brave confession this evening was intended. I take the joy of that moment entirely to myself, lay claim to it myself against the whole world, yes, in spite of yourself if the old self-will tempted you to deny it. Our souls touch, even though you may long enough resist in yielding me up the hand which once threw my money at my feet."

A few rapid strides brought him to the piano, and immediately after tones such as threw me into a kind of ecstasy fell upon my ear: and these exquisite harmonies were inspired by me, an insignificant little being! They had "nothing to do with those" whose conversation was wafted to us from the distant chamber. Yes, high rose the liberated springs of youth in the heart which had suffered so sorely, which had sought to atone for a brief period of mighty passion by the sacrifice and resignation of life's happiness and life's enjoyment. And those hands which had "never touched the keys since" now began the air expressive of the secret link which bound his mature and powerful mind with my weak, vacillating, childish one—

"Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea;
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee!"

"Good heavens, is not that Herr Claudius playing?" said Fräulein Fliedner, coming into the saloon and clasping her hands with joy at sight of who was sitting at the piano.

I passed by her—I could not possibly let her see my face. I hid myself in one of the deepest recesses of the windows, behind the thick, heavy silk curtains, which I drew together, all but one little slit; thence my cheeks might glow and my eyes peep out in happy peace. None troubled themselves about me, not even Fräulein Fliedner, who had sat herself down in the remotest corner and yielded herself up to the delight of listening.

For one moment the saloon remained empty. Every tone, even the faintest, floated toward me, a burst of laughter occasionally reaching me from the room with the deer's head.

Suddenly the princess crossed the threshold. I saw how she breathed freely at finding herself at last alone. She took the shade off the lamp standing on the tea-table, so that the light fell directly on Lothar's portrait. Once again she gave a hasty and suspicious glance round that and the adjoining room, then stepped up to the picture, drew a book from her pocket, and with the utmost rapidity drew a few pencil lines on the paper. She evidently sought to catch the outlines of the handsome head, or perhaps only "the eyes so full of soul."

I started in my hiding-place, for all at once I saw into the noble lady's proud heart, and said to myself that she would give years of her life if she might call the portrait on the wall her own. No one could have sympathized more fully with her at that moment than I, the happy one to whom that "other soul" was speaking in touching melodies. I felt as though I must spring up and seize both book and pencil to conceal them, for she did not hear the steps approaching through the whole length of the rooms. She did not look up as Charlotte passed noiselessly up the room, casting a sidelong glance at her, and started back in blank amazement as in the pianoforte player she recognized Herr Claudius. Before I could foresee it she had softly closed the door, so that the music was heard more faintly—then, with a few steps, she stood behind the princess.

The noise at last caused the distinguished sketcher to look up. The crimson of terror overspread her whole face, but she recovered herself with inconceivable rapidity, closed the book, and cast a glance of proud indignation over her shoulder at the disturber.

"Your highness, I know that I seem guilty of an inexcusable intrusion," said Charlotte. Every nerve in the strong, self-possessed girl's frame trembled; I could hear it in her voice. "It is a favorable moment, which I have boldly seized without permission, in order to speak to your highness; but I do not know how to accomplish it otherwise. Even if your highness would grant me an audience at any time at the castle, I believe I should not find the courage to say that which beneath the shelter of those eyes"—she pointed to Lothar's picture—"I venture trustfully."

The princess turned to her now in unfeigned surprise and said:

"And what have you to say to me?"

Charlotte sank on her knees, seized the noble lady's hand, and pressed it to her lips.

"Your highness, help my brother and me to our rights!" she entreated in a half-choked voice. "We are deceived as to our real name; we have to eat the bread of dependence while we have the fullest claims to a considerable fortune and might have been long independent. Proud, noble blood flows in our veins, and yet we are bound with chains to this Krämer house and compelled to share in its burgher life."

"Stand up and collect yourself, Fräulein Claudius," interrupted the princess. Her highness' very grave demeanor was not encouraging. "Tell me, first, who deceives you?"

"It will not cross my lips, because it looks like black ingratitude. The world knows us only as the adopted children of a large-hearted man."

"I also——"

"And yet it is he who is robbing us," Charlotte broke out in despair.

"Stop. Such a man as Herr Claudius neither robs nor deceives. I should far rather suspect you to be guilty of a grievous mistake."

I should like to have sprung out and embraced the lady's knees for that speech.

Charlotte raised her head. It was evident she was gathering up all her courage. With a rapid movement she also shut the door, through which came the sound of a lively conversation between Dagobert and the maid of honor.

"Your highness, this is not a question of money—that is quite another matter," she said decidedly. "Herr Claudius is fond of property, but I am myself thoroughly convinced that he would reject any such unjust acquisition. On the other hand, your highness will admit that many a fine character has by the passionate following up of an idea, an obstinate, blind view of something, been led first to deceive themselves and afterward to commit crimes against others."

She pressed her hand to her breast and took a deep breath, the wondrous melodies soaring aloft yonder the while. After the lapse of long years the pent-up soul was unsuspectingly bursting forth in thrilling tones, and here was his stainless name brought in question and I durst not even warn him, but must hold out on the rack. How I hated the accuser over there at that moment!

"Herr Claudius despises the nobility; he hates it, indeed," she continued. "He is, as a matter of course, powerless to shake those that exist, but wherever opportunity offers to prevent the strengthening of the aristocracy he does it with all his might; and indeed on that point he does not hesitate to use deception itself. Your highness, a new member of the aristocracy arose at my brother's birth, and I say it with pride, another firm support to the foundation of the widely envied caste: for we, my brother and I, are aristocratic out and out. But for that very reason we must never learn who it was that gave us life. Herr Claudius will not tolerate the coat of arms beside the old burgher name."

The princess' face became suddenly as pale as death. She raised her hand quickly and pointed to Lothar's picture.

"And why did you specially wish to tell me all this under the shelter of these eyes?" she said in an altered, husky voice.

"Because they are my dear father's eyes, your highness. I am his daughter."

"It is a lie—a horrid lie! Don't say that again," she exclaimed. How dreadfully her amiable face had changed, how hard and sharp was the gesture with which she raised her arm! "I will not suffer a stain upon his name. Claudius was never married—the whole world knows that. He never loved any one, never. O Heaven, do not rob me of this one comfort!"

"Your highness——"

"Be silent. Do you really wish to maintain that he forgot himself, that proud, incomparable man? And even if it is true, can you advance that as a right?"

With painful scorn the trembling lips enunciated these last words.

Charlotte had sunk back, speechless from amazement, but the insult struck her like a blow in the face and gave her back her resolution.

"He never loved," she repeated. "Does your highness know why he incurred death of his own free will?"

"From sudden dejection. He was ill—ask everybody that knew him," she murmured, covering her eyes with her hand.

"Yes, he was ill. He was mad with despair at the death of——"

"Whose death? Ha! ha! ha!"

Charlotte sank once more upon the ground, and embracing the princess' knees, while tears of anxiety streamed down her cheeks, said:

"Your highness, I implore of you to listen to me out for one moment more calmly. I have gone too far now to draw back. I must speak out the truth for my brother's sake, for I dare not let you rest in the belief that we are illegitimate children. Lothar von Claudius was married privately. His nuptials were celebrated and blessed by the Church, and he lived in honorable wedded love in the Carolinenlust. We were born there."

"And who was the happy one whom he so fondly loved that he ventured on death for her sake?" inquired the princess in unnatural calm.

She stood there like a marble statue, and the words came toneless from her lips.

"I cannot find courage to utter her name," said Charlotte, as if exhausted. "Your highness has received my communications, too, too ungraciously. I dare not venture further. That man over there," she pointed backward over her shoulder toward her own room, "above all things must not know that I am acquainted with the secret. Have we not lost our anchor without that, when your highness turns away from us, deserted and persecuted beings? I have formerly trembled at every passionate word or sound, fearing it would penetrate yonder. I know you will not hear the name calmly——"

"Who told you that, Fräulein Claudius?" interrupted the princess, drawing herself up. Charlotte's last words had sufficed to call up all her latent pride. "You are on quite a false track if you ascribe my momentary haste to aught save unbounded astonishment. What is it to me who the lady was? I would spare your mentioning her name, but that I wish to prove to you that I can listen to it very calmly; and therefore I command you to close your confessions with this name."

"Well, then, your highness, I obey. The lady was the Princess Sidonie von K."

She had miscalculated her powers, the proud princess. She had fancied she could have preserved the contemptuous smile upon her lips, command the blood in her cheeks, no matter how the name might sound; and now it fell like a flash of lightning on her head, and she sank back against the wall and groaned aloud as if a knife had gone through her breast.

"That is indeed the cruelest deception a woman was ever guilty of," she breathed forth. "Shame! shame! How black and false!"

Charlotte offered to support her.

"Begone! What do you want?" she burst out angrily, throwing off the young girl's hands. "Some demon must have suggested the fiendish thought to you to select me, me of all people, for your confidante. Begone! I give you back your confidence. I don't want to have heard anything, nothing whatever, for I never can nor ever will have a hand in helping you to your so-called rights."

She rose, but was compelled to support herself by leaning upon the table. "Be good enough to call my attendants. I am very unwell," she commanded in a feeble voice.

"Forgive me, your highness," Charlotte entreated, beside herself.

The princess pointed to the door, silent but imperious, as she sank into the nearest arm-chair. Charlotte fled from the room and immediately after it was filled with people, rushing in hurriedly. The music also ceased with one shrill chord. Herr Claudius entered.

"An old attack has come upon me suddenly," she said, smiling faintly at him. "I have cramp in the heart. Will you lend me your carriage? I cannot possibly wait till mine comes."

He hurried out and in a few minutes conducted the suffering lady downstairs. She leaned heavily on him, but the way and manner in which she took leave of him fully proved that Charlotte's communications had failed to affect her high esteem for him in the very faintest degree.

XXX.

I MADE use of the general confusion and consternation to effect my escape, and wrapping myself in my hood and cloak left the front house. My knees still trembled and the blood coursed feverishly through my veins—the scene had been a dreadful one. The unparalleled imprudence I had been guilty of in thus mixing myself up in the private relations of the Claudiuses I now bitterly repented in its unavoidable consequences. Link by link the chain of circumstances was made to pass before my eyes, and a malicious hand seemed to be always drawing me into a participation and sympathy with the various phases of its development. I had been compelled to hear him for whom I would willingly have shed my heart's blood charged with a flagrant fraud. Every word had been to me like the stab of a dagger and filled me with hot resentment against his accuser; and for all that I had been forced to remain in my hiding-place with clinched hands and streaming eyes. Yes, at that very moment I felt crushed by an oppressive weight of shame. Had I not once sought at court, in presence of the princess, just as Charlotte was doing then, to slander the unsuspecting man with all my might? Had I not then openly declared with cruel courage that I could not endure him? And were I to serve him all my life long as a menial, never could I atone for all my childish delusions against him. These thoughts drove me out of his house into the deadly stillness of the garden. Could I but have wandered on thus on the smooth broad road further and further till I reached the haide, where Ilse and Heinz were just now calmly seated beside the large earthen stove. Could I but have seated myself on the little stool near Spitz' shaggy coat and felt once more, as in the by-gone quiet, homely winter evenings, Ilse's dear, hard hand upon my head,

perhaps peace might have returned to me. Peace! It was only now I began to learn the value of that inward and outward calm; only now, since the wild beating of my heart had driven me restlessly hither and thither—now raising me up to heaven, then casting me down again in an abyss of bitter self-reproach and remorse.

The garden was now bright as day; the crescent moon stood out in sharp relief like silver against the cold blue sky. I crossed the bridge. Beneath it lay the frozen river, winding between the leafless bushes, and the branches in the bosquet shone with a silvery gleam. The stony Titans on the pond no longer stood on a blue velvet ground; they were supported now by a gigantic diamond formed of ice, and they had turbans of snow surmounting their bearded faces, while the gauze draperies of the frozen Diana were bordered with a thick hem of white fur. Every outline of the little rococo castle had been delicately painted by Frau Holle's white pencil, and she had laid a large, spotless, white pillow on the balcony in front of the glass doors. With what childish innocence I had made my first acquaintance with the secret of the sealed chambers. I only saw in it a fairy-tale! And now it represented a handful of papers which were concealed there and from which two people of unlimited ambition expected that the golden magic door would in very deed be thrown open which was to pour the treasures of the world all smoothly into their lap.

I looked up at the library windows. The lamp was still burning on the table, but a shadow kept passing to and fro upon the ceiling. It was my father's; he seemed to be more uneasy and excited than ever. Greatly alarmed, I sprang upstairs; the library was locked. Between the incessant pacing which measured the room I could hear a suppressed muttering and my father striking his clinched hand upon the table so that it creaked.

I knocked at the door and begged him to open it.

"Leave me alone," he called out roughly from within, without coming near the door. "Forged, did you say?" He uttered a wild laugh. "Come here and prove it. But take away your sticks. Why do you strike my head? Oh, my brain!"

"Papa! papa!" I called out anxiously.

I repeated my entreaty to be let in.

"Go—don't torment me," he answered impatiently, wandering further away in the room.

I was obliged to obey unless I would excite him still more, and retired for the present. I lighted the lamp downstairs in his room and prepared everything for the night. There lay the papers he had received after dinner that day, laid together and evidently untouched. There was only one which he had crumpled up into a ball and thrown on the ground. I unfolded it and immediately saw a red line marked along a long article. The name of Sassen struck me at once among the letters and filled me with a foreboding of terror. I ran over the commencement, but could not understand it; it was a mass of technicalities. But now its meaning flashed upon me and, quite crushed, I shaded my eyes with my hands.

"This medallion swindle has given a tremendous blow to faith in so-called 'authorities.' One of our very first names has been thereby compromised forever. Dr. von Sassen, with singular blindness, has recommended the forger and his medallions—of which not one are real—to the several courts and universities. Professor Hart, of Hanover, who was the first to discover traces of deception, says, indeed, that the forgery is a masterly one."

Professor Hart, of Hanover! That was the professor who used the strange words by the graves of the Huns; the man with the good countenance and tin case slung across his shoulders. I had taken a fancy to him because he had so manfully defended my beloved haide, and now this almost child-like, mild old man had turned into an armed opponent of my father's and thrown him from the saddle, as Dagobert had said this very day. And that was the medal for whose purchase I had demanded my money in such an unbecoming manner from Herr Claudius, and on his but too well-founded refusal I had denounced him at court as one who would fain appear to be the best informed in everything! I saw him again at that moment as he stood looking so wisely yet modestly at his own medal, maintaining his own opinion so quietly but decidedly.

And because knowledge oftentimes disdains to display her powers before the world at large, he had allowed himself to be shamelessly reproved by Dagobert, and I, like a grateful echo, had repeated his words. How victoriously

justified the proud, silent one was now! It was this very medallion business which had now led to my father's fall at court, and that was what the pitiful creature, Dagobert, had been darkly and mockingly hinting at this evening. My poor father! This one error sufficed to pull him down from his high position and place him at the mercy of his enemies and enviers. That was surely sufficient to disturb the brain of one who toiled day and night incessantly in the interests of science.

How weak I felt in my young, inexperienced nature, face to face with this sad misfortune. I understood very well that at such a time even the best-beloved voice could not help to bring a man comfort—and what indeed could I say to him? But I dare not leave him alone. I must let him doubly feel the watchful, silent love which guarded without making itself a burden.

Hastily I left the room intending to run upstairs and not cease begging for admittance till he opened the library door to me. Suddenly I paused and listened. A noise proceeded from my bedroom as if furniture was being moved. I tore open the door. A flood of moonlight dazzled me as I entered, for both windows were open. In my excitement at my aunt's arrival I had forgotten to shut them and close the shutters. With a shriek I bounded backward. A man held the fatal press in his grasp and shoved it aside with repeated pushing, so that the little door was fully disclosed to view. He turned round and disclosed Dagobert's white forehead. His eyes sparkled at me. With one bound he was across, shut the door behind me, and drew me further into the room.

"Be rational now for once and reflect that my life's happiness and yours also are hanging on this moment," he whispered. "Charlotte made a regular mess of the whole thing. She told our secret to the princess and blurted out the whole matter. The worst thing that could have happened to us is this resurrection of a mad passion on the part of her old highness, who won't allow my father to belong to another, even in his grave. Now we have two opponents to struggle against, who may very possibly be in secret league—such an insane old maid would trust the devil. Who can guarantee us from finding one of these legal seals fallen off some fine morning? It wasn't my uncle did that—not he; every one knows

how he guards these same seals so sternly. It can fall off quite accidentally, and then if the papers in the writing-table should vanish, who in the world is to know anything about it? Don't be a child. Here is the key in the door. I only need to turn it—it is no breaking in if I just go up and bring away in safety what belongs to me of right.”

I know not myself how it was practicable to me at such a moment to glide behind him with such lightning speed, turn the key in the door, and put it in my pocket.

“Serpent!” he hissed between his teeth. “You wish to sell yourself dear. You think with this key in your pocket you are still more attractive for me.”

At that time I had not the faintest idea what these odious words meant or how could I have vouchsafed the wretch another glance?

“I wish to keep you back from doing wrong,” I said, putting my back decidedly against the door. “Be open and true with Herr Claudius; you will attain your object much more easily thus than if you were to break the lock upstairs. I will go with you, and this very hour we will tell him everything.”

I stopped, for his eyes were scanning me in an offensive manner and a mocking laugh played round his mouth.

“You are beautiful, Barfüsschen!* The little lizard with the princess’ crown has turned into a siren during the last few months, but where is the wisdom of the serpent gone?” He laughed aloud. “A charming position truly, by Zeus! We should walk up *in propria persona* into my uncle’s very presence, present him our secret on a salver, and retreat with long faces!” He approached me nearer, so that I drew myself still closer up against the wall. “Now, let me say one thing to you. I still restrain myself and do not attempt to touch you; you have to thank the extremity of my weakness and my secret adoration of you for that. I will not give you cause for excitement, for I know you are a mischievous little devil. I believe that in such moments, through sheer obstinacy, you are quite capable of denying what I, happy one, have long known!”

What did that mean? I must have looked very much astonished, for he laughed again.

* Little barefooted one.

"Oh, don't look as if I were the wolf and you Red Riding Hood looking at the villain with innocent, interrogating eyes!" he exclaimed. "Things have been made much more disagreeable, indeed, to-day. Your inconceivably busy tongue, which in both our interests I had already endeavored to curb, has proclaimed the stain of your Jewish descent; your papa has also made his position at court untenable; but my passion for you is superior to all that. I think, too, that my mother's princely mantle will suffice to hide much"—he almost touched my ear with his lips—"and then I will see my charming little Lenore, who——"

Now I understood him, and how bitterly did I rue the day that I had adopted the brother and sister's cause with such blind enthusiasm. I turned away my face and lifted my arms above my head so as to form a kind of shield from him.

"Ah, there is the demon again! Are you not going to strike me?" he muttered between his teeth. "Take care. I told you already."

"I know very well that you could strangle me with one squeeze of your hands. Do it, then," I cried fearlessly. "Of my own free will I will not deliver up the key. You are a robber. I am no longer the ignorant child that saw in those"—and I pointed to his glittering epaulettes—"simply an ornament. I know they should be worn only by the honorable. And here comes a haughty officer under the cloud of night and mist and threatens a defenseless maiden."

"Oh, the little viper is trying to sting," he said, throwing his arms round me; but my litheness came to my assistance. Shrieking aloud, I slipped from his grasp and jumped on the window-sill.

"For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?" called out old Schäfer. He was on his way home and was just crossing the white snow field.

"Come, come up quickly," I stammered, half between tears and joy at being set free.

Dagobert disappeared with one spring out of the opposite window, while the old gardener ran along the front of the house and made his appearance immediately after.

"What was the matter?" exclaimed he, looking round the room in astonishment. "My goodness, my dear young

lady, you look just like a canary after the cat has been in the room. Perhaps there was a noise in the old house? Don't be afraid, though; it is only the mice, miss. There are no ghosts, however much all people may declare it is 'not all right' in the Carolinenlust."

I left the good old man, who endeavored to soothe me so kindly with his gentle voice, under the impression that it was some imaginary phantom which had thus terrified me, and only entreated him to shut the shutters as tightly as possible; then I locked all the doors and went up again to the library. I felt myself so weary of struggling; the last remnant of the obstinacy and self-will with which I had faced the new world and of which I had had a full share was exhausted, and I was still so young, so very young! Was life, then, one such eternal struggle with irrevocable consequences brought on by one's own errors? And must my troubled, youthful soul for all future time, thrown on its own efforts, go stumbling on helpless and without support through storm and darkness? I shuddered with horror. If some pitying hand were not stretched out to me I must sink in fear and distress. "My plaidie to the angry airt—I'd shelter thee!" Ah, yes, to be hidden, to be able to fly thus with wounded pinion beneath the care of some stronger power and shelter there! How I had overestimated the strength of those childish hands because they had been able to brave the haide storm so merrily! but how wearily they sank down already, groping for some support or stay.

The library was still locked when I went up, and knock and rattle as I would I could get no answer. At first I thought my father had left it, it was so deadly still within. But soon after I heard in the distance a kind of rumbling followed by a burst of laughter; the noise came from the antique cabinet, whose doors were standing wide open. It sounded to me as if heavy, solid masses were being thrown down, and the laughter was so unnatural that it made my hair stand on end. Next something was thrown into the library and broke into a thousand fragments on the floor. A cry of absolute triumph followed this ruin. I bounded with clinched hands incessantly against the door and repeatedly called my father in despairing tones.

Just then a door opened on the broad staircase and

Herr Claudius came out of the observatory. The moonlight shone as day behind him. I hurried toward him, and amid convulsive efforts imparted to him my state of mental anguish and distress. A deadly silence had succeeded the noise which I heard in the library, and while that lasted I related with downcast eyes and in a whisper the story of the medallion.

"I know it already," interrupted Herr Claudius quietly.

"Misery is setting my father mad," I said. "Oh, how I suffer for him! He is branded now and has lost his famous name since last night."

"Don't believe that. It would be sad indeed if a single error could suffice to undo the work of a whole lifetime. Herr von Sassen has rendered incalculable benefit to science, and that is just the reason why these hornets try to sting him the deeper in the hour of his distress. That will pass by. Calm yourself, Lenore, and do not cry."

He raised his hand as though about to take mine in it, but let it fall as quickly, and stepping to the library door rattled at the handle.

Just at that moment there was a noise on the floor within of crashing and rolling.

"You are no Agasias!" shrieked my father. Alas! I scarcely recognized this loud voice. "Sassen has lied. Ask Hart, in Hanover; he knows it. Away with you, you too are false."

One could hear him distinctly kicking the fallen object about.

"Oh, that is the sleeping boy, his idol, about which he has been writing whole volumes to prove that it is one of Agasias' works," I said, trembling. "Oh, heavens, he is smashing the antiquities."

Herr Claudius knocked loudly at the door.

"Won't you open the door to me, doctor?" he called aloud, but with a perfect, self-controlled voice.

My father uttered a loud laugh.

"And it is written—ha! ha! that it has all been lies from the very beginning. Beware if you are an immortal spirit. See! how the red flames devour you! Ha! there they are whirling toward the ceiling, the whole brood of lies, of which the celebrated man was so proud! Smoke, nothing but smoke!"

Herr Claudius drew back in horror. Thick smoke and

a suffocating smell began to issue from the keyhole and the hinges of the door. Some woolen material was burning.

"He is burning his manuscript," I exclaimed, "and the curtains have taken fire."

I broke into a loud lament and threw myself in despair against the door. Alas! what availed my poor little hands and feet against those solid panels, which never stirred?

Herr Claudius rushed back to the observatory, and just then I bethought me of a small, almost invisible door in the library; it led into a large dark lumber-room which separated the former from the observatory. And even if the door was locked, two good kicks would suffice to break in the fragile planks. But that was unnecessary. Rapid steps within and an angry cry from my father informed me that Herr Claudius had effected an entrance without any resistance. The key had been turned and the door just thrown open. What a sight! Smoke and vapor and roaring flames between, with showers of crackling sparks, enveloped my father's familiar writing-table. "The red tongues" shot up but slowly at the heavy woolen curtains, but all the merrier did they liek up the piles of old pamphlets which filled a shelf between the windows. My father shrieked and behaved like a madman. He fled from Herr Claudius, who sought to lay hold on him and lead him from the room. Under the poor retreating one's feet the shattered fragments kept incessantly crunching; the floor was covered with remnants of precious antique terra-cotta vases.

I ran in.

"Back, Lenore, back! Remember your inflammable dress," exclaimed Herr Claudius anxiously, while he barred my father's way, who was seeking to throw himself into the flames. "Run to the front house for assistance."

As I hastened off I saw my father stumble over the marble figure lying on the floor, and raised in Herr Claudius' arms, who, despite his frantic resistance, bore him to the door; but I had scarcely reached the hall when I heard the two gain the stairs, still struggling.

"Murder, miserable murder!" shrieked my father till the walls rang again. Then ensued a frightful sound, like something falling.

To this day I cannot tell how I regained the *bel-étage*

with my powerless limbs. I only know that I felt as if suddenly caught up by a whirlwind and thrown down where I saw a heap lying on the lowest step of the staircase.

Herr Claudius had already regained his feet. He was supporting himself against the banisters and turned his face, on which the moon shone, toward me. It was deadly pale.

"We unfortunately fell," said he, still breathless from exertion and pointing to my father. "He is unconscious and I cannot carry him further. My poor, poor Lenore, your feet can scarcely carry you, and still you must bring me aid."

Then I rushed through the garden. Behind me the fiery tongues from the library windows kept darting out, and thick black clouds of smoke enveloped the tops of the trees.

"Fire in the Carolinenlust!" I called out in the hall.

In a moment the whole front house turned out. Universal horror seized everybody when, on reaching the yard, they saw the glowing red reflected in the quiet silvery sky above the row of poplars. Whoever had hands seized tubs and buckets, and two great engines were fetched out of the coach-house. The fire had been observed in the neighboring streets also; streams of people came in one after another; in a short time the whole space before the Carolinenlust was covered with people to the rescue, who broke up the ice in the river and pond and bore water to the blazing story.

When I returned Herr Claudius was leaning against the banisters; he pressed his left arm with his right against his breast. I was speechless with sorrow and bent over my father, whose head rested on the lowest step. Herr Claudius had made him a pillow of his cloak. His eyes were shut, and the sunken cheeks looked so bloodless and pallid I thought he must be dead. Groaning, I hid my face in my hands.

"He is only stunned, and as far as I could possibly ascertain he has broken none of his limbs," said Herr Claudius.

How I learned to value that calm, composed voice in those hours of anxiety and suffering; that very voice whose calmness I had once mistaken for iciness. At its sound I looked up at once.

"Downstairs, in Herr von Sassen's own room," it said to the people, who lifted my father from the ground. "It stands far apart. The house is massive and there is water and helping hands enough—the fire will not penetrate thither."

A stream of people brushed past us upstairs.

"And you?" I said to Herr Claudius, and we walked side by side, and the two men, conducted by Fräulein Fliedner, carried my father to our apartments. "I see very well you are suffering; you have hurt yourself; and, Herr Claudius, how severely you are rueing having taken my father and me into your house!"

"Do you think so?" An almost sunny smile for one moment banished the knitting of his brows, caused by pain. "I calculate otherwise than you think, Lenore. I understand the arrangement perfectly according to which we must first go through various probations ere we reach our heaven. With each we approach our aim more and more nearly, God be praised!"

He went on up to the burning story and I went to my father. He lay on his bed still and motionless; only when a fire-engine came thundering over the bridge and stopped before the house with a loud noise he opened his eyes and looked around him, evidently quite unconscious. From that moment he kept incessantly whispering to himself, soft and low. Fräulein Fliedner laid cold cloths on his head, which seemed to have a tranquilizing effect upon him. Help and assistance did not fail us. Even Fran Helldorf, who since that fatal Sunday morning had never ventured to enter the Claudius garden, so far overcame her nervousness and fear of meeting her father that she had come up to me.

I sat beside the invalid and held his burning hand in mine. His strange muttering, which never for a moment ceased, the sight of his suffering face, from which all trace of independent thought seemed forever vanished, and in addition the intense anxiety I felt about Herr Claudius, who I knew was upstairs in the burning rooms—all this contributed to put me in a state of silent despair.

A shaded night-lamp was burning in a corner of the room; deep shadows surrounded the sick-bed; and the light through the window shone all the brighter. Yonder, over the silvered row of trees, the heavy clouds of smoke

waved like a banner; the sparkling streams of water rose hissing from the fire-engine out of the midst of the human turmoil. To my consternation they sank down and fell only to rise with renewed majesty. "Take care!" perpetually resounded above the tumult and hum. Rescued objects, such as vases, mirrors, marble statues, were being carried past and laid beside the Diana. Huge piles of books were ranged beside the goddess, and the furniture and table-slabs looked strange enough on the snow-white wintry landscape.

The intensely black volumes of smoke gradually dispersed and rose like a veil before my fixed gaze; the noise of passing up and down stairs grew fainter and the carrying past of things to be saved ceased.

"The fire is extinguished," said Frau Helldorf, drawing a long breath, and I buried my streaming eyes in the pillows.

Charlotte entered. The skirt of her dress trailed along the floor, her heavy plaits hung down in disorder; she had toiled like a man at the rescue.

"This has been a nice evening for us, princess," she said dejectedly as she sat down on a little foot-stool near me, thoroughly exhausted. She rested her forehead against my knee. "Oh, my poor head!" she whispered as the two ladies left the room for a moment. "Child, if you knew how I feel! I tell you the desperate idea occurred to me up there if it would not be better that the fire should devour me and my clothes and put an end to the torment here"—she pressed her hand to her heart—"and I passed those sealed doors, thinking one of them must give way and my mother stretch out her arms to her unhappy child and draw her in out of the way of the swarm of human beings around. This day for the first time I have felt it impossible to forgive my father for having left us so confidently in his brother's hands, resting on his truth and faith. And no matter how fearfully he might have suffered, he ought not to have died; he should have lived for us. He acted in a cowardly manner!"

The crowd of people outside were gradually disappearing, it grew quieter, and the hissing of the streams of water, which were still sent up from time to time, struck more sharply on the ear. At length the longed-for physi-

cian made his appearance. While he was examining the patient and watching silently a powerful voice was heard outside in the lofty corridor and finding its way into the silent room.

"Did I not know, Herr Claudius, that this bringing to light of heathen goddesses and statues which had been wisely consigned to oblivion by your predecessors would prove an offense to the Almighty?" said the old book-keeper in his most sonorous tones.

"It is the incorrigible old fanatic," murmured Charlotte in a tone of vexation.

"Did I not foretell that the fire would fall from heaven?"

"It didn't fall from heaven, Herr Eckhof," replied Herr Claudius impatiently.

"You misunderstand evidently, dear sir," said another voice gently.

"Oh, that is that abominable deacon, the greatest baiter of souls in the whole residenz. Both have just come from their devotions, as one may hear! The fire in the Carlinenlust is the greatest triumph for them," whispered Charlotte.

"Brother Eckhof knows very well that punishments are not sent thus direct from heaven in these days as formerly," continued the voice; "but it acts always just as certainly—only it depends upon our understanding it. Yes, Herr Claudius, it pains me to my heart that you should be thus visited; but I cannot forbear at the same time to admire the wisdom which in such inexhaustible mercy thus speaks to you. In wisdom and justice this has happened, that the heathen abominations called works of wonder which I have just seen lying, disguised and blackened by smoke, in the garden might be destroyed."

Before he had finished his sermon Herr Claudius, without a word, opened the door of my sitting-room and entered. The doctor joined him. Herr Claudius stood near the table, on which the lamp was burning and the light from which fell full on his face. He still pressed his left arm against his breast with the right in that strange manner. I saw from my dark corner how his face overclouded at the doctor's report.

"You are suffering also, Herr Claudius," I heard the doctor say to him at last.

"I have hurt my arm," replied Herr Claudius, "and

will put myself into your hands yonder at the Vorderhaus."

"That's right; and your eyes must be kept in the dark for some time, I perceive," he said emphatically.

"Not a word about that. You know that is my weak point where you can make me anxious."

My heart stood still—if he should grow blind! I fancied no human heart had ever suffered so much misery and wretchedness as I had that day.

Charlotte rose quickly and went away. The door of my sitting-room was opened almost at the same time, and men's footsteps came in in haste.

"Herr Claudius! Herr Claudius! Oh, this villainy!" I heard the old bookkeeper moaning.

He came within reach of my eye. All his unction, every trace of his pious, holy walk before God and man, seemed washed out of that discomposed, disturbed countenance. Herr Claudius signed to him to lower his voice, but he was far too much excited to notice this movement.

"That to me, to me!" he said in a frenzy of indignation. "Herr Claudius, some wretch has taken advantage of the general confusion at the fire to break into my rooms and rob me of the box containing my poor savings. Oh, I can scarcely keep my feet. I am worried beyond measure. You will see, it will be my death."

"That is a sinful and unchristian speech," said the deacon, gently reproving his violent outbreak. "Remember, it is but the earthly mammon. Besides, it is not at all impossible that the thief will be discovered and that you will get your money back again, and if not, you must remember what Scripture says upon the subject. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'"
I saw how his eye rested on Herr Claudius as he said: "Is not that a precious consolation to those who are tried by the loss of earthly goods?"

"But the 1,000 thalers of the missionary money were in the box too, and they are to be paid in in the next few days," said the unfortunate bookkeeper, tearing his nicely arranged hair.

Now it was the deacon's turn for alarm.

"Oh, that is indeed very much to be lamented, dear Herr Eckhof," he exclaimed; "but may I ask, how could

you leave this money intrusted to your care—forgive me—so unwarrantably carelessly guarded? You know that the welfare of other souls hangs on every penny. What shall we do now? The money must be paid in in a few days. Our society is a model of punctuality and must not lose its good name on your account. You will, I am sure, see that. I am unutterably grieved, but with the best will in the world can do nothing to help you. You must provide the money by the appointed time.”

“But how is that possible? At this moment I am a beggar!” He held his white hands toward the lamp. “I haven’t even my diamond ring, the precious gift of my former master, to dispose of. It was in the box too. I always take off that piece of vain, worldly ornament when I go to my devotions. Oh, my Lord and my God, how have I, thy faithful servant, deserved this fate?”

The deacon approached him nearer and laid his hand soothingly on his arm.

“Well, well, do not despair, my dear Herr Eckhof. The matter is grave enough—one cannot overestimate it; but I will tell you: one who, like you, possesses such a powerful patron may take courage. Herr Claudius is a rich and noble man: it is a mere trifle to him to aid you in your distress. He risks nothing in so doing; he has you and your salary in his own hands and can easily repay himself by deducting it.”

“I should first have to reflect upon that, I assure you, Mr. Deacon,” said Herr Claudius quietly. “In the first instance, I never allow that kind of thing, and then—You maintained just now that the Almighty in his wisdom and justice had permitted the destruction of the finest monuments of human genius created by himself, the blossoms of a glorious culture. Well, then, I will for once place myself in your position, will think of and interpret the Almighty’s actions after your limited and one-sided view, and say that he has in his wisdom and justice permitted that the money which was destined to compel some heathen’s soul to embrace Christianity should be lost. Such a doubtful convert costs 1,000 thalers probably, and further, it will teach you, Herr Eckhof, the lesson that the Church, for whom you have sacrificed what is holiest of all—your family—is the most ruthless of creditors in money matters.”

He looked with dignity and pride over his shoulder at the little deacon, who sprang waspishly at him.

"We must be ruthless; it is our sacred duty," he said zealously. "What would become of the Church if we did not gather and work and save while it is day? And the harder it is to obtain the mite, the greater the toil and the severer the poverty incurred, the more pleasing is it in the sight of the Almighty. You are one of us, Herr Eckhof. You know what rules we are compelled to obey and will, I doubt not, sacrifice everything to procure the money. I wash my hands of it. I have done more than I was called on to do. I have humbled myself before the unbelievers."

He walked stiffly to the door.

Frau Helldorf then approached her deeply dejected father.

"My father," she said in a quivering voice, "I can help you. You know I have 700 thalers from my late mother, and the remainder I can get from my brother-in-law, who has saved a little capital."

Eckhof turned round, as though those gentle tones had been crushing and loud as thunder. He looked into his daughter's face like one petrified, but suddenly pushed her away.

"Away, away with you! I will none of your money," he cried and stumbled out after the deacon.

"Calm yourself, my good lady," said Herr Claudius in a soothing tone to the weeping one. "That was all that was wanting, that you should add your mite to this insatiable abyss. I was compelled to be hard. One cannot be too severe with this presuming caste; but take courage—all will yet be well."

While they were all talking to each other he came across to the sick-room where I was. He bent over my father, who, utterly unmoved by all which was going on around him, kept murmuring monotonously on and on.

"He is happy in his fantasies; he is in sunny Greece," whispered Herr Claudius to me after a pause. He was standing close to me. Suddenly I caught his right hand in both of mine and pressed it to my lips. My offense, my former rudeness to him was atoned for.

He literally staggered back. He never uttered a word, but he laid his hand on my head, pushed it back, and

looked inquiringly into my eyes. Oh, how heavily did the lids lie over those beautiful blue, star-like eyes!

"Is all right between us now, Lenore?" he asked at last in a half-choked voice.

I nodded my head vehemently in assent, without remembering the dark secret that lay between us.

XXXI.

My father lay for several days hanging between life and death. The attack of delirium which was the cause of his setting the Carolinenlust on fire did not, as I at first apprehended, proceed from insanity, but was the first outbreak of a nervous illness which had been for days progressing unobserved. The dangerous state in which he lay could not be concealed from me, so I sat day and night by his bedside, thinking in my old self-willed fashion that death could not dare to extinguish the faint spark of life beneath my watchful eyes. If he really was scared away by the maidenly soul's threatening aspect I know not, but the angel of death passed by, and after a week of indescribable anxiety the doctors pronounced the invalid out of danger. In addition to Frau Helldorf a strong nurse also assisted me, and the duke's household physician, whom his highness himself had sent, remained for hours at the Carolinenlust watching over "the precious life of the famous man." It now became apparent that it was a very erroneous supposition that the court at K. would be so affected by the medallion affair as to cause my father's fall from favor. The duke had never been kinder or more sympathetic than during this trying time. Several times a day his messengers came to make inquiries after the invalid's health, and with them came an inroad more or less of servants from the once more cringing court coterie.

A sick-room had been arranged in the front house also—a dark, heavily curtained one. Herr Claudius had sprained his arm severely in that fatal fall, and in addition the stifling smoke and dazzling flames had brought on inflammation of the eyes, of which the doctor at the commencement had formed a very bad opinion. I suffered indescribably, for I was not allowed to see him. But

when the physician allowed me to leave the sick-bed and sent me into the open air for a breath of freshness, then I rushed to the front house and never rested till Fräulein Fliedner came out and gave me a report in person. In the midst of his severe sufferings, however, he never forgot his little Lenore. The window-sills and flower-stand in my room were perfect beds of violets, lilies-of-the-valley, and hyacinths, and I always felt on entering as though buried in spring odors. The doctor was of opinion that the next thing would be that the haide princess would fall a victim to a poetical death from these overpowering odors. Schäfer confided to me, grinning, that it looked awfully bare in the hot-house and that the head gardener cut a very long face. Frau Helldorf, the doctors, the nurse—every one, in short, who wanted to get a breath of air out of the sick-room flew to the deliciously decked chamber. One person only regarded it with unfavorable eyes, and that was my Aunt Christine.

As long as my father lay there unconscious she came to visit me daily. I must confess I always trembled when I heard the sound of her light, uncertain footstep; her first appearance at the sick-bed had deeply pained me. With the most graceful turn of her beautiful head she had whispered me, after the first glance at the sunken, suffering face: "Child, prepare yourself for the worst; he is rapidly approaching his end." Since that time I had been afraid of her. Anger and vexation, however, overcame me one day when she came into my room.

"Oh, how heavenly!" she exclaimed, clapping her white hands. "Darling, you must have a remarkably good allowance to admit of indulging in such an unusual luxury."

"I did not buy the flowers. Herr Claudius ordered the room to be decked thus," I replied, much offended. "I indulge in luxury indeed!"

She turned round, and I saw for the first time that those splendid, dove-like eyes could look daggers.

"It is your room, Lenore?" she inquired in a cutting tone.

I assented.

"Oh, child, then it is a mistake of yours. Well, well, that is very pardonable—you are still but a child," she said, resuming her good-humor, stroking my hair with a

smile, and passing her velvety fingers over my cheeks. "See, old Schäfer is such a fool about flowers. No doubt it is he who has crammed your room this way to suffocation; but, you rogue, it seems to me you have a stone in your sleeve for him. A man like Herr Claudius, so grave and preoccupied with past sorrows—I have learned that from you and Frau Helldorf—would never think of overwhelming such a little—don't take it ill, little mouse—such a tiny hop-o'-my-thumb with the choicest bloom of his hot-houses."

I remained silent and swallowed down my ill-humor. Her opinions might well have cast me down, for beside her Juno form there was no denying that I looked one of the most insignificant of beings that could be fancied; but the flowers came notwithstanding from Herr Claudius, and I knew it to a certainty, although I hid the sweet consciousness deep within my heart. My aunt did not enter that room again; she said even the momentary stay in the hot-house atmosphere had given her a violent headache. It was strange, but this beautiful woman with her soft voice and fascinating manner did not succeed in ingratiating herself at the Swiss cottage. Old Schäfer always made me a reproachful face whenever I mentioned Aunt Christine, and said his pretty, clean little room was a complete show. The lady never touched a duster and didn't seem to know the use of the nails on the wall; she left her clothes lying on the floor. And Frau Helldorf was seriously angry one day when she saw me giving my aunt money.

"You are really committing a sin," she said when we were alone again, "because you are busily supporting laziness and extravagance. The table upstairs is covered with all kinds of dainties. The woman ought to be ashamed of herself, eating oysters and potted eel and having bottles of champagne hidden behind the sofa, and all that paid for by you! You cannot possibly continue that. Let her earn her own bread by giving singing-lessons. Her voice is gone, but her school is first-rate."

To my own comfort I was able to assure her that that would certainly take place. Aunt Christine had repeatedly said that she had decided upon a plan, but would require the advice and support of a man to enable her to carry it out, both of which she had hoped to get from my father;

but as he had thrown her off so unkindly she would await Herr Claudius' recovery. From all she could hear of him, he was just the man to be able to give her advice and support in a longer stay at K. I saw nothing objectionable in the idea, and was a little indignant when Frau Helldorf shook her head and said she thought Herr Claudius would scarcely meddle in the matter when once he had seen her painted face.

The little woman had become inexpressibly dear to me during my time of trouble. What a sacrifice she had made in entering the house where her unforgiving father dwelt! Literally flying, she always arrived breathless and terrified—the fear of another such meeting haunted her. The poor thing loved her father tenderly notwithstanding, and was deeply grieved to learn that he had disposed of everything he possessed to meet the missionary debt. In spite of every effort no traces of the thief had been found. To me the old bookkeeper seemed greatly altered. Every time he met me now he greeted me, and had even come over occasionally to inquire for my father. Charlotte was of my opinion; she maintained angrily that he kept out of her and Dagobert's way; that "the old fool" decidedly repented having betrayed his master's secret, and in the end—she foresaw that—at the decisive moment he would endeavor to deny all. The passionate girl suffered deeply. The princess was unwell, and since that evening had kept herself aloof from all the court bustle, and the house in the Mauerstrasse seemed to have dropped from her memory. What was to be done now? My repeated suggestions to Charlotte to tell Herr Claudius everything were met by her with irritation and the remark that the perfume of the flowers in my room had got into my head. From that time I preserved silence.

Five weeks were at last past since the accident at the Carolinenlust, and terrible trials now lay behind me. My father had long left his bed; he recovered with amazing rapidity; had been cautiously made acquainted with the past occurrences by the doctors, and had received with wonderful equanimity the intimation that his manuscript was destroyed. The news that a number of books and manuscripts of great value had not been saved, and also that the finest specimens of terra cotta vases had been destroyed, and that the utmost efforts to find the missing

hand of the sleeping boy had proved unavailing affected him much more painfully. He shed tears of sorrow and was with difficulty calmed when he thought that he had been the unwitting means of robbing Herr Claudius and the world of this priceless treasure. The duke visited him very often. He was thus led back unconsciously into his usual train of thought and action and had already formed innumerable plans and designs. He treated me with indescribable tenderness—misfortune had bound father and daughter more closely still together. He could not bear me to be out of his sight. Nevertheless he assured me frequently and gravely that he would send me for a month to the haide in the beginning of spring; I had grown too pale and needed refreshing.

It was a dull afternoon in March. For the first time for five weeks I intended to visit the Swiss cottage. My aunt had written me a few lines reproaching me for my persistent neglect of her now that my father was recovering. Charlotte met me in the hall. I was frightened at the sight—such a wild outbreak of joy and triumph I had never yet seen in mortal face. She took a paper from her pocket and held it before my eyes.

“There, child,” she said breathlessly; “at last the sun is rising upon me—at last! Oh”—she spread her arms out as if to embrace the whole world—“look at me, little one. Happiness looks thus! To-day for the first time I dare say my aunt the princess. Oh, she is indeed good, noble! Thus to have conquered herself could only be done by the nobly born! She writes to me she will see and speak to me—to-morrow I am to go there. Should our claims be established—I should like to see who will be so bold as to dispute them—then everything will be done to restore us our rights. She has already spoken to the duke about it—do you hear?—to the duke,” she said, seizing my arm and shaking me. “Do you know what that means? We shall be recognized as the Princess Sidonie’s children and enter the reigning house as members of the family.”

A shudder ran through me. The decisive moment had arrived.

“Will you really bring the matter forward while Herr Claudius is still suffering?” I inquired in an unsteady voice.

“Ah, bah! he is quite well again. The thick curtains have been removed from his windows; he is wearing a green shade and has moved into a little curtained parlor next my room for the first time to-day. He has treated himself to a little private amusement in presenting Eckhof, whose birthday it is, with 1,000 thalers in the loveliest little purse as compensation for the missionary money and that he may be able to release his goods. The old man was overcome to that degree that I almost died of fear lest he would have fallen at my uncle’s feet and confessed his blabbing before our very faces. Happily his emotion prevented his finding words; besides, I had become hard, hard as a stone. I have suffered too much in these last few weeks. From Dagobert, too, I have had to listen from morning to night to the bitterest reproaches at my ‘awkward way of managing the matter.’ I do not know of anything now which can hold me back; and if my uncle were summoned to the bar at this very moment I would not raise a finger to prevent it.”

She accompanied me as far as the garden gate. From thence I saw her fly like an arrow into the leafless thicket. The intense joy which filled her breast drove her to the top of the hill, where she could give vent to her rejoicing over the wide world. I should have liked to turn back again and hide myself in the darkest corner of the Carolinenlust to conceal my pain and anxiety about Herr Claudius.

I slipped past Aunt Christine’s room on entering—to my astonishment the barking of a dog issued from it—and ran upstairs. In the Helldorf rooms my beating pulses always became tranquilized. Cries of joy met me. Herr Helldorf stretched out both hands to receive me, Gretchen seized me round my knees, and little Hermann sat crouching on the floor and tossing his little feet, begging to be taken up. The little mother, however, rapidly produced the coffee machine and a piece of cake specially laid aside for me, and soon after we were all seated in familiar conversation round the table. Now and then a bold cadence struck in; runs and trills clear as crystal interrupted our conversation—Aunt Christine sang or rather trilled below; it sounded beautiful; but as soon as ever she attempted to bring out a tone fully and sustain it, it went to my heart. That voice which had once, no doubt, been perfectly enchanting was completely cracked.

"That lady downstairs ought to seek occupation as soon as possible. She leads the life of a sluggard," said Herr Helldorf, frowning slightly. "Her singing is of an excellent school, and I am quite ready to get her pupils. She can earn a great deal if she likes. But the hauteur and the scornful smile with which she thanked me for my kind patronage I can never forget. Since then she has not appeared here again."

"Blanche is barking—there is some one coming, mamma," said Gretchen.

"Yes, Blanche. That is a new inhabitant of the Swiss cottage which will be introduced to you, Lenore," said Frau Helldorf, smiling. "Your aunt bought a charming little dog for herself the day before yesterday. Schäfer is beside himself; he cannot endure the mischievous little animal."

She paused suddenly and listened; a man's footsteps were heard on the stairs, crossing the anteroom and pausing a moment there. Frau Helldorf's face had become white as snow; she stood there holding her breath, motionless as a statue, and looking as though she could not advance one step to open the door. All at once the handle of the door was turned—it opened and a tall, fine-looking man stood on the threshold.

"Father!" shrieked the young woman—it was a cry of mingled sobbing and joyous exultation. Eckhof caught her in his arms and pressed her to his bosom.

"Anna, I have been hard. Forgive me," he said in a trembling voice.

She could not answer. She only buried her face still deeper in his breast, from whence she had been so long shut out. The old man extended his hand silently to his son-in-law; Helldorf grasped it firmly for a moment, the tears springing to his eyes, strong man though he was.

"I will give you my hand too, grandpapa," said Gretchen, standing on her tip-toes and trying to reach her grandfather's height.

The children's sweet voices at last made the young mother look up. She flew to her boy, picked him up off the ground, and held him up to her father.

"Kiss him, papa," she said, still wavering between smiles and tears. "Gretchen you know, but not the little fellow; and only think, he has my beloved mother's large

blue eyes. Oh, my father!" And she flung her left arm anew around his neck.

By that time I had reached the door and slipped out noiselessly. Notwithstanding my familiarity with the Helldorf family, I felt that at this moment, when the breach which had so long divided the father and daughter was closing, I had no business in the little circle. The penitent ought not to feel a stranger's gaze upon him in that consecrated hour. But it had grown light within my soul—as light as with the people yonder, on whom, strange to say, just as I was escaping a single pallid ray of evening sunshine broke forth from the dismal March sky, lighting up the silent spectators on the wall, as though even they would fain revive and share in the blessing of reconciliation.

My aunt was lying on the sofa as I entered her room. The little fury, Blanche, received me with vehement barking and buried her teeth in my dress. I gave her a light tap on the head, at which she fled to her mistress' lap yelping.

"Oh, you mustn't strike my little pet, Lenore," exclaimed my Aunt Christine, half-entreating, half-pouting. "Look, now, you see, Blanche is angry with you, and you will have a great deal of trouble to win back her heart."

I thought to myself that was a trouble I would never take.

"Look, isn't it a little darling?" She stroked the really beautiful little animal tenderly and pushed its long silken hair out of its eyes. "And just think, I got it for a mere nothing—the man who sold it to me was in want. I gave 4 thalers for it. That was literally getting a present of it, was it not?"

In my extreme amazement I could find no words. I had shared my purse honestly with Aunt Christine lately—she had got 8 thalers.

"I had just such a little dog once before—a splendid specimen. It was a gift of Count Stettenheim's and cost more louis-d'ors than this little one cost thalers. There could not have been a prettier sight than that shining pale yellow creature on its blue silk cushion. The poor thing was choked in the end by a partridge bone."

She chattered away thus, smiling all the time. The beautiful dimples in her cheeks were more than ever

visible in these smiles, and I could not help looking with ever new admiration at her delicate regular teeth, which shone like pearls between her rosy lips. The head of this beautiful woman was dressed irreproachably, but her attire otherwise really shocked me. A cast-off violet dressing-gown covered with stains hung loosely over her lithe figure, and from the opening at the throat and the holes in the elbows appeared a night-dress of very doubtful cleanliness. The state of the room completely harmonized with this toilet. In the middle of the room lay a pair of dirty white satin shoes, which had evidently been degraded to the rank of slippers and to serve occasionally as toys for Blanche. The once shining tables and drawers were covered with a thick coating of dust, and pillows and articles of dress were thrown together in disorder behind the curtains. The air, however, was filled with the most delicate and delicious scent of violets.

"You find me in the greatest possible disorder, do you not?" said she, catching my glance. "I didn't want to annoy you and add to your trouble when I visited you—you had enough care on your young shoulders without that. But now I may venture to tell you that I feel inexpressibly wretched shut up between these four walls. Schäfer is an arrant fool. Such a man has not the faintest idea what a woman like me, who has been honored by the whole world and petted and spoiled on all hands—he has no idea, I say, of what I am accustomed to expect. Instead of seeing that my room is properly cleaned every day, as is usual in lodgings, he expects me, if you please, to dust his furniture and sweep the room! He may wait long enough for that."

She put her hand into a basket, took out a handful of almonds and Messina grapes, and began cracking the almond shells.

"Take some too," she said to me, giving Blanche at the same time one of the grapes. "It is little indeed I can offer you. However, a rogue gives more than he has. One of these days it will be another story, and then you shall see what charming little dinners I can arrange. Apropos, to return to Schäfer. The sleek old hypocrite can be very churlish too. Only think, when I was buying Blanche the day before yesterday and counting out the money to the man, he warned me in the most shameless

manner that I should first pay him for the arrears of rent and the expense he had been at for light and firing during my stay here; but that is not my affair, darling, is it? You rented it for me, didn't you?"

I grew fiery red from anxiety. How was this to end? If I were to write for Herr Claudius from early morning till late at night I could not possibly obtain a maintenance for my aunt. Ilse's face rose before me. How often had I thought in my inmost heart that the faithful old soul was hard and unforgiving because she had sought with all her might to prevent any approach between Aunt Christine and me; now I had got into the difficulty and rued it.

"Aunt, I must tell you candidly that my means are very small," I replied in great embarrassment, but still very plainly. "I will be quite open with you and confess at once that my father does not even know that I earn the housekeeping money almost entirely by writing the names on the seed packets for Herr Claudius."

She looked at me at first amazed and doubtful; then broke into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, such are your poetical relations to each other? That is rich, and I was so absurd as to cherish a momentary fear—no, little one," she exclaimed gayly, "that will cease when my position changes one of these days, you may rely on that. I won't allow it then. *Fi donc*, how shameful! You will see how I will manage the man. Copying! That is indeed a hard business, and it is impossible I can live on your purse any longer. But what to do? Child, I am counting the minutes till this Herr Claudius is well once more and able to see me."

"He left his sick-room for the first time to-day."

"And you only tell me that now?" she said, half-rising from her recumbent position. "Don't you know that you are delaying the happiness of my life every moment you lose? Have I not repeatedly told you already that I will lay my future in this honorable man's hands, and on his advice and decision make my weal and woe dependent?"

"I don't think he will be able to advise you one bit better than Herr Helldorf, aunt," I said. "Herr Claudius lives quite withdrawn from society, while Helldorf has introductions into the very best families as a teacher. He told you himself some time ago you could earn a great deal of money if—"

"May I beg," she said in a freezing tone, "that you will keep your wisdom to yourself? It is my affair as to how I will open my path, and I must confess that I have no inclination whatever to form any kind of connection with the people upstairs. Cease, then, to propose anything of the kind to me. They are the kind of cit-like acquaintances which afterward hang about one's neck like lead and—in short; child, they are eternally removed from that sphere which I have been accustomed to live in. And now I again entreat you to do everything in your power to procure me an interview with Herr Claudius."

I rose, and she glided from her sofa, slipping her feet into the satin shoes, which gave me an opportunity of observing that she wore flesh-colored silk stockings.

"Oh, you little mouse of a thing," she said, raising her slight figure to its full height and stretching her arm out over my head.

We were standing exactly opposite the glass, and I involuntarily looked in it. My bronzed, Creole complexion, though spotless and adorned with the freshness of youth, looked nevertheless to great disadvantage beside the peachy cheeks and brilliantly white forehead of my aunt; but I also saw for the first time to-day very distinctly the repulsive varnish which lay in a thick coating on her face. I felt ashamed for her sake when I thought of Herr Claudius' keen, quick glance making the same observation, but as often as I tried to beg she would lay it on somewhat less palpably, so often did I find it impossible to utter a word, more especially as she kept calling me a little brown hazel-nut and wondering at my smooth gypsy skin, inasmuch as the Jacobsohns had always been blessed with lily complexions.

I withdrew myself from her coaxing hands and left the room with the assurance that I would go direct to Fräulein Fliedner and advise with her as to the possibility of the interview.

I was set free with a fervent kiss.

XXXII.

"My dear little Lenore, your very best plan would be to speak to Herr Claudius himself," interrupted the old lady before I had got through the half of my mission.

"Can I speak to him, then?" I inquired anxiously.

"Of course. Go upstairs into the front room where Lothar's portrait is. A great many have been up there to-day already—the saloon is a temporary business room."

I went up. At the door I paused a moment to still my beating heart, which I thought would burst, then I entered softly. The room was not so dark as I had expected. The windows were shaded with some kind of green stuff which shed a soft and pleasant light. Herr Claudius sat in an arm-chair with his back to me; he had a green shade over his eyes and was leaning back against the cushions. He did not appear to have noticed my entry, or thought perhaps it was only Fräulein Fliedner, for he did not alter his position in the least.

My deepest, warmest wish was now fulfilled. I saw him once again!

I could not speak. I was terribly afraid of the first sound of my own voice in the quiet room. I approached him, almost inaudibly, nearer and nearer, and grasped his left hand timidly in mine as it hung over the arm of the chair. The fair head still remained immovable in its former position, but quick as thought the right hand closed also on mine, and I felt myself all at once a prisoner.

"Oh, I know to whom the little brown hand belongs that twitches so timidly between my fingers, like a nervous fluttering little bird," he said, without stirring. "Didn't I hear it coming upstairs and every step saying distinctly: 'Shall I go in or not? Shall pity for the poor prisoner win the day, or the old refractory spirit that says wait till he can leave his cellar and come to me——' "

"Oh, Herr Claudius," I interrupted, "I was not refractory, indeed."

He turned his face toward me quickly without letting go my hand.

"No, no, Lenore, I know you are not," he said in husky tones. "Those around me had little idea why I was al-

ways so impatient of the slightest noise at the twilight hour and imperiously requested the profoundest silence. At that hour I listened with supernatural ears, or at all events a longing heart, for I knew to a moment when the little maiden's feet left the Carolinenlust. I followed every step through the gardens and up the stairs and listened with eagerness to the half-whispered 'How is he? Does he suffer much?' That sounded anything else but refractory; and then I saw the unruly locks shook back with the well-known gesture of the head, and the dear large, naughty eyes gazing at Fräulein Fliedner while she made her report."

I forgot everything that divided us and gave myself up unreservedly to the charm of the moment.

"Ah, she did not understand me so well," I said thoughtlessly. "I longed so inexpressibly that she would bring me to you once, just once. I should have felt more at ease if I could but have looked into your eyes and they had said to me, 'I see you.' Please, just raise the shade once."

He sprang up, took off the shade, and threw it on the table. His slight figure stood before me, tall, elastic, and upright as ever.

"Well, then, I see you," he replied, smiling. "I see that my little Lenore has not grown an inch in these five long weeks, and the curly head just reaches now, as ever, to my heart. I see, too, that the same head is thrown back just as sturdily and rebelliously as ever. But what can you do against it if nature choose to see a marvelously tiny fairy child among her creations? I see still further that the little brown face has grown paler with terror, sorrow, and night-watches. Poor Lenore, we have much to repay—your father and I."

He took my hand as though he would draw me gently toward him; the gesture brought all my wicked recollections back again and filled my heart with misery once more. I tore myself away.

"No," I cried, "don't be good to me. I have not deserved it of you! If you only knew what an abominable creature I am, how deceitful, false, and cruel I can be, you would turn me out of your house——"

"Lenore!"

I fled before him to the door.

"Don't call me Lenore. I would far rather you called me refractory, wild, ill-bred; that you would sternly pronounce me unwomanly—only not call me by my name so kindly and tenderly. I have done you no end of mischief and harm whenever I could. I have attacked your honor and made common cause with your enemies. You will never forgive me, never. I know it so well that I don't even venture to entreat."

I literally groped for the door-handle. He stood at once beside me.

"Do you really think," he said, "that I will allow you to leave me in this state of violent excitement, with those pale, trembling lips that make me feel quite anxious?" He took my hand gently from the door. "Strive to calm yourself and listen to me. You came hither a perfectly untouched, undisciplined nature and saw the world through your innocent child eyes. I blame myself severely for not having emptied my house of its injurious elements at that time, since I knew in the first hour that a turning-point in my life had come and that everything must undergo a change. It is true, your so plainly expressed repugnance to me made me resigned. I was too proud ever again to forget, and confined myself to acting as a warning voice. I hesitated too long in doing what looked unmerciful and yet was the right thing. There was not space for you and Charlotte in my house—she must give way. Whatever therefore may have occurred, whatever you may have done unfavorable to me from simple ignorance of the circumstances, does not need a single word of forgiveness. I am just as guilty as you are. There is only one sense in which you can really give me pain, and that is when you do as you have so often done already—turn away cold and repulsive from me. No, no, that I cannot see," he broke off, deeply moved as I burst into a flood of passionate tears. "If you must cry, henceforth it must be here alone." He drew me to him and laid my head upon his breast. "So now make your confessions courageously. I will fix my eyes on the curtain yonder and listen with half-averted ear."

"I dare not tell," I said in a low voice. "How glad I should be if I might tell you everything! But the time must come yet, and then— One thing, however, you shall learn now, for I did that quite alone. I slandered you at court. I said you were a cold-blooded miser, a——"

I noticed how he secretly laughed.

"Ah, has little Lenore such a bitter tongue as all that?" said he.

I pushed away the arm that held me and looked up anxiously.

"Don't think that all I did was mere childish prattle," said I.

"I don't think so, either," he said soothingly, while the same delicious smile played round his lips. "I will hear all the dreadful discoveries come on me one by one and wait patiently for it—then I will be the judge. Does that satisfy you?"

I assented.

"But you must then submit unconditionally to the sentence I pronounce."

With a long-drawn sigh I answered:

"So I will gladly."

Then I dried my eyes and began to speak of my aunt.

"I have heard of this strange guest from Fräulein Fliedner," he said, "and of her having fled for shelter under the foolish little woodlark's wing. Is she the lady to whom you sent the money?"

"Yes."

"H'm—I don't like that. I have unlimited confidence in Frau Ilse and she spoke very badly of this aunt. How does the lady come to have such a strange fancy to speak to me? What does she want with me?"

"Your advice. Oh, please Herr Claudius, be so kind. My father has cast her off."

"And despite that she wants to live in one and the same place with him and to run the danger incessantly of meeting him who disowns her. That doesn't please me. But, well or ill, I must receive her, because I will not allow the haide princess to form any connections henceforth of which I know nothing and which cannot stand the test of my searching eye. Frau—what is her name?"

"Christine Paccini."

"Well, Frau Christine Paccini is requested to drink tea in the Vorderhaus this evening. Run now and fetch her! Now, does not my complaisance deserve even a shake of the hand?"

I turned back and laid my hand voluntarily in his. Then I flew away.

I doubt whether I had ever fled even over the haide, where unburdened with either care or sorrow I had skimmed so many a time, with the same speed as I did over the gravel walk on this occasion. I knew now that I could never again lose my way in the wide world, for he would guide me wherever I went. No terror could come near me again, for I would fly to his bosom and shelter me there. How shyly had I drawn back when he took me in his arms, and what a blessed rest had come over me there! Just so it used to be when, as a child, I screamed aloud with terror and Ilse opened her arms to take me to her heart and soothe me.

When I reached Aunt Christine again she was busy making chocolate. Blanche was running about on the table, licking up the chocolate which had run over and helping herself from the cake-plate. My! how chocolate, cakes, and Blanche were all thrown to the four winds as I made the announcement that she was invited by Herr Claudius to drink tea at his house! Now I saw for the first time how she had longed for and calculated on this moment. With a half-triumphant, half-absent smile she kept opening and shutting drawers and boxes. I got one glance at the awful chaos of faded flowers, ribbons, and tinsel.

"Darling, of course I must dress myself first, and the room is so small—you could go up to the Helldorfs' for a little, couldn't you?" she said. "But one favor you must do me: go to Schäfer—I don't want to talk to the unmannerly old man any more; he has splendid yellow roses. Let him cut me some and give him whatever he asks for them, even if it be 2 thalers. You will get it again, perhaps to-morrow. So go," she said, pushing me toward the door, and as I looked at her interrogatively, "I am accustomed to have flowers in my hand when I make my appearance as a guest," she explained.

Schäfer gave me the roses and I took them in. Then I went to my father and obtained leave to drink tea at the Vorderhaus.

An hour later I was walking with my Aunt Christine across the garden. On my return I had found her already wrapped in her cloak and hood and closely veiled. It was half-dark and a close rain began to fall as we took the road to the bridge.

"Where are the ladies going to?" inquired a voice behind me. It was Charlotte, only now returning from the hill.

"I am going to introduce my aunt to the Vorderhaus," I replied.

The young lady made no remark and Aunt Christine also remained silent, and so we walked quietly beside each other. I felt suddenly very nervous. The two ladies crossed the bridge before me together. Strange, it looked almost "uncanny," so marvelous was the similitude between the two figures. Both had the same proud, disdainful turn of the head, the same development of shoulders, the same walk, and in height I do not think there was a hair's-breadth between them. They might have been mistaken for each other, and yet they inwardly repelled each other; at least Charlotte kept at a distance.

"Pray take your things off in my room," she said to me coldly in the corridor.

We entered the room, which was already comfortably warmed and lighted. Fräulein Fliedner was arranging the tea-table and received us with great reserve.

"Where is Herr Claudius?" whispered my aunt to me—the first word which had fallen from her lips since we had left the Swiss cottage.

I pointed silently to the door of the saloon.

"Oh, a piano!" she exclaimed in great delight, and flew to the instrument, which was standing open. "How painfully long have I been obliged to go without such a sight! Oh, allow me, if but for a moment, to touch the keys! Pray, pray—I shall be as happy as a child if I may but strike a chord or two."

In another moment cloak and mantle were thrown on the nearest chair, and to my unspeakable amazement Aunt Christine appeared in full dress. A rich white satin fell in long folds upon the carpet, and from the lace which trimmed her very low dress a bust was disclosed to view which in its dazzling whiteness and exquisite chiseling of form almost surpassed the Grecian statues in the antique cabinet. Her long curls fell in waves over her neck and bosom, and the pale dewy roses lay scattered here and there through the masses of her blue-black hair.

"That is rather strange," said Charlotte dryly and without the least reserve.

My aunt, however, had seated herself at the piano, the instrument quivered beneath her touch, and immediately after she began singing in a tuneless, but powerful voice, and with demoniac expression, "*Già la luna in mezzo al mare—*"

Then the door was thrown open and Herr Claudius stood on the threshold, pale as a ghost. Behind him was Dagobert's amazed face.

"Diana!" exclaimed Herr Claudius in indescribable horror.

Aunt Christine flew toward him and sank on her knees.

"Pardon, Claudius, pardon," she entreated, almost touching the ground with her forehead. "Charlotte, Dagobert, you, my long-lost children, help me to implore that he will receive me back again into his former love."

Charlotte uttered a cry of rage.

"Acting," she stammered forth. "Who has paid you for this admirably played part, madam?" she inquired in a cutting tone. Then she turned on me fiercely and shook me by the arm. "Lenore, you have betrayed us!" she shrieked out.

Herr Claudius separated us at once and pushed her back.

"Take Fräulein von Sassen away," he said, addressing Fräulein Fliedner. How dead his voice sounded! how he endeavored to master his fearful agitation!

Fräulein Fliedner put her arm round me and led me into the room where Lothar's portrait hung. The door was shut behind us. The old lady trembled like an aspen leaf, and a kind of nervous shivering made her teeth chatter.

"You have brought an evil guest into the house, Lenore," she said, listening anxiously to the sound of Aunt Christine's voice, which we could hear quite distinctly. "You couldn't tell, indeed, that it was she, the false, faithless one; that Diana for whose sake he suffered so sorely. God forbid that she should again establish her power over him! She is still entrancingly beautiful."

I held my head in my hands. The world must certainly crush me!

"How cunningly she managed it, too!" continued the old lady in a bitter tone. "How she surprised everybody around with the first lightning-like declaration! All at once she remembered her 'long-lost children' whom she deserted so shamefully."

"Is she really Charlotte's and Dagobert's mother?" I exclaimed.

"Do you doubt it, child, after all you have seen and heard?"

"I thought they were his children"—pointing to Lothar's picture—"and the Princess Sidonie's," I groaned out.

She drew back and stared at me.

"Oh, now I begin to understand," she said. "That is the key to Charlotte's incomprehensible manner and behavior; she thinks as you do. She thinks she was born in the Carolinenlust. Isn't that it? Well, I shall find out who has discovered the so carefully guarded secret and made such a hare-brained use of it. Meantime I will tell you that two children saw the light in the Carolinenlust: one died in a few hours; the other when six months old of convulsions; besides, they were two boys. Dagobert and Charlotte, though, are both the children of a Captain Méricourt, who was married to your aunt and who fell at Morocco. Poor child! your good angel forsook you when you took that woman under your protection. She will bring misfortune with her—misfortune to us all!"

I buried my face in my hands.

"When Eric became a visitor at her house she was already widowed and prima donna at the great opera-house in Paris. Her children were being educated at a Madam Godin's. Eric was as fond of them as if they had been his own children; and although so deeply injured and wounded by their mother, he was so noble as to take the little ones when the lady, forgetting every tie of honor and of duty, left them at the pension utterly unprovided for. Madam Godin died soon after, and he imposed on me—to whom alone the children's origin was confided—the strictest silence. He wished to spare the children all their lives the knowledge that they had a degenerate mother—and badly they requite him." She wrung her hands together silently and paced up and down. "Only not that," she murmured. "That voice yonder pleads with veritable demoniacal power—I hear it. How it flatters and complains and softly implores! She will throw new chains round him."

"Uncle, uncle, oh, I suffer bitterly—I, wretched, ungrateful creature that I am!" shrieked Charlotte in the other room.

I rushed out of the door, down the stairs, through the garden. I was banished out of paradise by my own fault, my own fault. In spite of Ilse's energetic remonstrances and warnings, against the express desire of my father, I had kept up a secret intercourse with this criminal aunt. I had led the demon of his youth back to the man whom I loved with all the power of my soul, and who would doubtless again poison his whole life.

In the hall where the bright lamplight fell upon me I paused in my furious flight. No, I dare not appear before my father in that plight. My hair and clothes all dripping wet from the March rain, which was falling fast and soft; my every nerve was quivering and my cheeks had a feverish glow. I went into my bedroom, changed my dress, and drank a glass of cold water. I must be quiet, very quiet, if I wished to obtain what I regarded as my sole means of salvation.

My father was sitting in his room in his comfortable arm-chair, reading and writing alternately, and near him stood a steaming cup of tea. He looked more cheerful and at ease than I remembered ever to have seen him, even before his illness, and the dear old absent smile had returned once more. Frau Silber, the nurse, was buttering bread and regulating the heat of the room by the thermometer, and she signed to me not to enter too suddenly. She was the very embodiment of carefulness, and I knew I could not leave my father in better hands.

I seated myself near him on a foot-stool, but so that my face remained completely in the shade. He told me with great delight that the court physician had been with him and told him that he might drive out to-morrow for the first time; that the duke himself would call for him in his carriage. Then he stroked my hair and said he was glad the tea at the Claudius' had not lasted too long and that I was back with him again.

"But how will it be, papa, if I go for a month to the haide?" I said, withdrawing still further into the shade.

"I must reconcile myself to it, Lorchén," he said. "You must go back for a time to what I may call your native air, that you may grow stronger. Both doctors have laid it upon me as a duty. As soon as it is warmer——"

"It is warm outside, deliciously mild," I broke in sud-

denly. "Just think, it seems to chase me to the haide. I feel as if I should be ill and could only ward off the enemy in the fresh haide air. Papa, if you are really going to allow me away at all, why not this very evening?"

He looked at me in amazement.

"That seems to you like madness, doesn't it?" I said with a faint attempt at a smile. "But it is more rational than you think. The air outside is as soft as possible. I would go by the night mail, and to-morrow evening I should be once more at my dear, dear Dierkhof. I should drink milk and breathe haide air for weeks and then return quite strong here when it is fine, when the trees are in blossom, and then—it is all right, is it not, papa? I can leave you, too, perfectly well in Frau Silber's hands. She will stay with you and you could not be in better care. Please, papa, do allow me."

"What do you think about it, Frau Silber?" he inquired undecidedly.

"Oh, let Fräulein Lorchén go, Herr Doctor," said the dear old thing, coming to the door instantly. "A man should not go against nature, and if the young lady feels as if she would be ill and that the air of the haide would cure her, in God's name say nothing against it. The night mail leaves in another hour. Pack up your things, miss, and I will take you to the station."

I left the Carolinenlust with hasty steps. It was pitch-dark, and my companion could not see the tears which streamed from my eyes as I nodded a "farewell" to the conservatory, where I had spent one moment of exquisite happiness. I had not meant to look up at the Vorderhaus as we passed through the yard; but what was my will in comparison with the anguish which raged within at parting? My eyes hung devouringly on the light that shone in Charlotte's room—they had forgotten to draw the curtains. They were still all assembled there; you could see it by the shadows which chased themselves over the ceiling. He had forgiven her, the faithless one, for whose sake he had once ranged the gardens whole nights long. He had been reconciled to her—it was a day of reconciliation—while the foolish little woodlark, frightened away from his heart, was flying away in the darkness of night!

XXXIII.

THAT was a meeting again! I wandered on foot from the last village to the Dierkhof, through the silent, leafless wood. It was dark in the thicket and dried leaves caught in the hem of my dress; they had been fluttering in the early morning as I issued forth into the world, and now they accompanied me like fallen spirits long strips of the way, rustling and whispering monotonously; and as I entered the boundless plain, as the Hünengräber came in view in the evening twilight, as I saw the lights burning in the distance at the Dierkhof and heard Spitz' well-known bark, I threw myself among the bleak, wintry haide bushes and wept with anguish. I was returning to it miserable and broken-hearted.

And then the four oaks continued ever increasing. I could distinctly see the dark spot in the middle, the old, well-worn magpie's nest. The young birds, which had taken such a lively share in my parting sorrow, were long since fledged and gone, and nothing remained save the old original pair that stayed as sentinels on the Dierkhof watch-tower and directed their sharp, wise glances toward the solitary child who came wandering thither across the haide. Deep in the dark arch of the doorway I could espy a spark of fire; the turf was burning on the hearth; and the familiar roof, from which the smoke rose in straight yellow columns toward the evening sky, looked as if it sprang directly out of the ground, so sunken and small did the Dierkhof appear to me now. Suddenly I saw Spitz running like mad across the yard. At the hedge gate he paused breathless for a moment, his ears cocked; then he rushed toward me and sprang up as high as my very face, whining with joy and trying to lick it. I had difficulty in keeping my feet.

"What's the matter with the animal? It's quite crazy," said Ilse, coming out of the door.

Ah, that voice! I ran across the yard and threw myself on her breast. There I thought I should escape from those torments which had chased me like furies through the quiet, solitary haide. She did not scream nor did she utter a word, but her arms embraced me closely and I was petted and caressed as I had never been in my child-

hood. I felt at once that she must have been longing intensely to see me, and when we entered the fleet I saw she had grown pale.

But Ilse never allowed herself to be entirely overcome by her feelings. She pushed me away suddenly and, looking at me at arm's-length, said in the same dreaded tone in which she had once laid my childish sins upon my head:

"Lenore, you have run away!"

Notwithstanding my inward grief I could not help smiling. I seated myself on Heinz' wooden stool and began telling her of the fire accident and of my father's illness, at both of which she threw up her hands in horror. That did not prevent her, however, from kindling the fire afresh, filling the kettle and putting it on the fire, and feeding me bit by bit with a piece of bread-and-butter, sorely against my will.

"Yes, yes, that was the wisest thing, no doubt," she said as I informed her at the end that the doctor had ordered me to the Dierkhof. She then left the room, and soon after led me to a bed shaken up as high as the ceiling.

"So, child, now you must go to bed and I will bring the elder-tea directly. One could see a mile off that you have caught cold on the journey. Your face is flushed—and you mustn't speak another word; to-morrow you shall tell me more."

At my earnest entreaty I was spared the elder-flower tea, but I was tucked into bed without mercy. There I saw Charles the Great's picture looking down upon me once more. I sprang up, took it off the nail, and turned the face to the wall. How I hated it! How much mischief, falsehood, and deception lay in the white forehead which had so completely dazzled me at the Hünengräber. It had served to illuminate my path into the dark and unknown world yonder—that deceptive light had all-unconsciously to myself lured me onward. It was this which had torn me away from my old home. Now I saw into the feelings which had then actuated me—they had blinded me and led me into a path full of errors.

I seated myself once again, as on the night of my grandmother's death, at the foot of my bed and gazed at the illimitable distance. No, not even at the Dierkhof could I find rest. The deeper and more complete the silence

around me, the wilder was the tumult of my solitary heart. Now I understood why my grandmother used to stand for hours together looking from the corner of the orchard into the wide waste beyond. The veiled eyes sought through that misty distance the lost, degraded one, whom the mother's heart, all deeply wounded as it was, could not forget. And for me too, that broad field of light, bedecked with countless glittering gems of night, all centered into one small point—over the distant ancient house of Claudius.

The wind was sighing outside and making the dry branches of the mountain-ash tap softly against the window. I drew back and covered my eyes with my hand. Just underneath stood the bench where I had first read Aunt Christine's letter. And now I had seen her in reality on her knees, that fairy vision; fairer than the fairest flower forms, of which my prettiest books in childhood described lilies and roses becoming transformed into. And from the satin folds two delicate arms had been stretched out to draw again to her faithless heart the man she had once so deeply injured. Involuntarily I beat my breast with clinched hands as I recalled that fatal moment. I had been weak and cowardly. I ought not to have come away. I should decidedly have laid my head where it had been but a few short hours before. He himself had assigned me that place and I knew it had been with real tenderness. I had felt it in the beating of his heart and the trembling of his hand as during my confessions it had kept tenderly stroking my hair. I ought not to have allowed those rosy fingers to touch him; then, perhaps, the wicked spell would not have been thrown around him.

No doubt it was bright at the Vorderhaus now, as bright as on the evening when the princess was there, and he was sitting at the piano. Forgotten were the days when for her sake he had never touched the keys. She was singing the intoxicating demoniac Tarantella to him once more, and within a few weeks a new mistress would be moving through the old Claudius chambers—not, indeed, with the dear forehead-band, but with a long, rustling silk train, roses in her hair and trills on her lips. The quiet company rooms would be full of life, guests coming and going, champagne corks flying, and nobody would blame the husband's choice. Was she not still a woman "of surpassing loveliness?" Now he would be my uncle. I

sprang up and moved restlessly about, quite beside myself. No, mine was no angel's disposition. I could not smile while the hot tears were in my eyes. I resisted the knife that was always turned so unmercifully against my breast. I would not return to K. I would implore my father to choose some other place of residence. How could I ever bring myself to utter the word "uncle?" Never, never.

The soft tapping at the window outside gradually turned into a violent pelting and beating—the spring storm was raging over the haide. Once again I heard the creaking and cracking of the old loft, the moaning and howling round the corners; and in the top of the oaks the rustling of withered leaves, which though long since dead and moldy kept falling with a ghostly noise upon the ash beneath. The old Dierkhof shook beneath the mighty gusts of wind, and in the roof the decayed wooden shutters groaned and the window-panes clattered softly, as if the storm were rattling small silver chains in its grasp.

Ilse came in to see how I was getting on.

"I thought as much. I thought you wouldn't be able to sleep," she said on seeing me sitting dressed upon my bed. "Child, you are no longer accustomed to the old haide lullaby. Yonder among the mountains, of course, the storm grows tame, but I don't like it that way half so well. Go to your warm bed again, though—it won't do you any harm."

Of course it would do me no harm—the familiar Dierkhof would shelter me from that!

I had now been three days at the haide, and the storm had raged incessantly day and night over the broad plains. Mieke, Spitz, and the poultry all fled for shelter to the barn, and from that hidden nook gazed from the open door upon the enemy as it flew by. But it blew in warm, and I even fancied that it brought a delicate perfume of sweet flowers with it now and then. Heinz, too, remained at the Dierkhof; Ilse would not allow him to go home in that tempest. But oh, how changed was everything! I no longer read aloud while we sat in the fleet—the fairy-tales had now no charm for me and tales of my town life were just as bad. As often as Ilse mentioned the name of Claudius—and that to my despair was very often indeed—I felt as if I must choke. I knew that if I once uttered the name myself all my efforts at self-control would at

once break down irreparably, and I should shriek out my sufferings to all the four winds of heaven and to the horror of the two faithful creatures by my side. Heinz now looked always shyly at me from afar, and Ilse told me, laughing, that he said I had turned into a real princess now—so abstracted; and he could not think why Ilse didn't hang up the window-curtains and produce the elegant sofa, as had been done for Fräulein Streit.

On the third day the storm abated. It still blew and indeed fiercely over the plain, but I could not endure being in the house any longer. I flew out, despite the whistling and gusts that still rose, and let them carry me over to the hill. There stood the dear old pine still firmly rooted, and as I threw both my arms around it it sent down a shower of its needles upon my hair. The broom bushes caught my petticoats too; but the spot where the Hünen-gräb had been opened the previous year lay bare at my feet, and little particles of sand were every now and then blown about where the human ashes had once been scattered. Red streaks from the setting sun hung over the top of the wood—the storm would begin afresh the following morning. It was as if the tumult of the air separated me from the outer world. Yonder ran the river across which the three gentlemen had then sought to escape from the barren haide; there had the tall slight form of the “old gentleman” trodden through the sand with firm footstep, while the handsome Tancred's dainty feet had kept anxiously to the velvet grass path.

It was awfully lonely up there now. I held my hand over my eyes, that I might be able to get a better view of the strange sight—the utter solitude of the haide! A dark object was moving on the narrow sand path in the distance which Heinz had dignified by the name of high-road. Goodness! Ilse had carried out her threat and sent for the doctor! My pale face, my dejected air, gave her the deepest anxiety. The dark object advanced nearer and nearer; the evening red shone upon it vividly—it was the same old trap which had brought the doctor to my grandmother's dying bed. It gave a swerve—the powerful horse and carriage stood out in sharp lines against the sky; I saw the carriage windows glitter and the driver seated on the box. Suddenly the carriage stopped and a gentleman got out, and though his figure had been care-

fully shrouded from head to foot, for all that I should have recognized it among a thousand by that one motion. My pulses stood still. I clinched my teeth and anxiously watched the carriage door. Now she, the beautiful lady in the velvet mantle, with the ermine thrown round her shoulders, would no doubt also get out. Uncle and aunt were coming to take back the runaway. But the door was closed and the carriage turned back toward the wood. Herr Claudius crossed the haide and came directly toward the hill; a large cloak fluttered about his shoulders and the blue spectacles shone in the evening light. I let go my hold of the pine, stretched out my arms, and was about to rush down the hill; but I let them fall again. That was not the way to meet an uncle. Staggering, I once more embraced the pine and leaned my head against its rough stem.

The steps were now approaching nearer and nearer. I never moved. I felt as though I were bound to the stake and must hold out in silent agony.

At the foot of the hill he paused.

"Won't you come one step to meet me, Lenore?" he called out.

"Uncle," came from my lips.

In a few steps he stood beside me—a smile crossed his lips.

"Extraordinary girl, in what a strange position you have placed yourself! Do you really think a sedate uncle would pursue a little runaway niece in such an anxious and vehement manner?" He took both my hands very gently and led me down the hill. "So, here the storm will pass over us. I am not your uncle, but I have been with your father and asked him for another right. He granted me leave joyfully to bring you home, but not to the Carolinenlust, Lenore. If you decide on going with me, then there is but one course for us both. Lenore, nothing stands between us now but your own decision. Have you still no other name for me?"

"Eric!" I shouted with joy and threw my arms round his neck.

"Naughty child!" he said, holding me fast. "What have you not done to me? Never shall I forget the moment when Fräulein Fliedner came back from the Carolinenlust and told me in terror you were gone—gone

with the evening mail! My little woodlark frightened away in night and darkness. And how I mourned that you were not even conscious of the pain you caused me. Lenore, how could you think it possible that I could just have taken my devotedly beloved maiden to my heart to put her away immediately after for the sake of that ugly, painted sin?"

I tore myself away.

"But just look at me," I said, inviting his criticising glance between laughing and crying. "Beside Aunt Christine I look just the miserable 'nothing' that Charlotte always called me. I saw my aunt at your feet; she implored forgiveness—and in what tones! And I knew too that you had loved this beautiful woman so——"

A burning crimson, such as I had never till now seen, overspread his face.

"I know Fräulein Fliedner has been chattering," he said. "She confessed herself that she was afraid she was the cause of your having fled, from having given expression, strangely enough, to the fear that I might again fall under the same spell. My little one, I will not allow you a single glance into that time which was succeeded by years of remorse. You shall retain your chaste child's eyes; they are my refreshment, my pride. I erred seriously at that period and misunderstood myself. I confounded the flame of passion with that starry light which first rose upon life's pathway with your appearance. The error of my youth was atoned for in every outward circumstance. Up to this hour I have had to suffer, but now I have had enough of atonement—I demand my right." He kissed me, then threw his cloak round me. "You will find some changes, my child, on your return," he said, after a pause, in a low voice. "The room on the ground-floor of the Swiss cottage is empty once more. The bird of passage has flown again to the South."

"But she was poor. What will she do?" I said, alarmed.

"That is all settled. She is your aunt, Lenore."

"And Charlotte?"

"She has received a terrible lesson. But I was not deceived in her—there is, in spite of all, a germ of real good in her. At first she was dreadfully shaken both in mind and body, but she has collected herself again, and now the

true pride and real dignity of her mind is breaking forth. She is ashamed of her way of going on at school. She learned little or nothing, notwithstanding her talents and the ample means offered her for their cultivation, because she always maintained she was born to something higher and did not need to work. Now she is going into an institution to prepare herself for being a governess. I do not object to this decision, because occupation will completely cure her; in other respects the Claudius house will continue to be her home. Dagobert is to leave the service and go to America as a farmer. The brother and sister's delusion with regard to their origin and the final disclosure about it has got noised about town. Who has talked of it no one knows. Dagobert's position would, however, become an unpleasant one, so he is going voluntarily. Only a few hours before I set out here I was with the princess."

I hid my face in his breast.

"Now the verdict is going to be pronounced on me," I whispered.

"Yes, now I know all," he admitted, assuming a severe tone. "The haide princess poked her wise little nose into the secret of the Carolinenlust the very first day of her arrival, and then assisted bravely in the intrigue against the unfortunate man in the Vorderhaus."

"And he won't forgive me?"

He looked down at me and laughed.

"Would he, then, have kissed the little red lips that can keep such heroic silence?"

We emerged from the shelter of the hill. The storm attacked us.

"Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast!"

I began to sing in the very teeth of the elements. It had become a reality. Protected by his strong arm, by his side, and sheltered beneath the "plaidie" he had thrown around me, I walked along, and the storm passed by me with its spring breath and whispered, "Caught, caught." And I laughed aloud and clung closer to him who guided me. Winds and bees and butterflies might fly henceforth in freedom o'er the haide—I should do so no more.

Ilse was sitting in the fleet peeling potatoes; Heinz had just come in from the orchard with the objectionable pipe

as we entered the barn-door. Never had I seen my faithful nurse so utterly confounded as when Herr Claudius threw back the cloak from my head and I looked out, laughing. The knife and the half-peeled potato fell from her hands, fell from her lap. "Herr Claudius!" she exclaimed in astonishment. At that name Heinz took his pipe out of his mouth and held it behind his back.

"Good-evening, Frau Ilse," said Herr Claudius. "You have been harboring a little deserter here. I have come to take her back—she is mine."

"Frau Ilse" now began to understand. She sprang up; knives, skins, potatoes, everything rolled on the flags.

"Oh, so that was the illness!" She clapped her hands. "Elder-flower tea, then, was not the very best cure! Nicely you imposed upon me, Lenore. And you intend to marry the child, Herr Claudius?" she said, while tears of emotion ran down her cheeks. "Only look at the tiny hands and face and the young, young eyes."

Herr Claudius blushed like a girl.

"She is satisfied with me, she is, my youthful Lenore!" he said gently and with some hesitation. "She maintains that she loves the old, dead old man."

I clung to him still closer.

"Oh, that was not what I meant, Herr Claudius," Ilse protested energetically. "I'd like to see the being who wouldn't say 'Yes' and 'Amen' too gladly; but—but—the number of people in your service, how can they look on such a tiny creature with respect?—a creature you could carry about the house in your arms like a child."

He laughed softly.

"She will gain their respect when they see how she governs the head of the house. And now, Frau Ilse, prepare yourself. To-morrow we set out. The intended bride must return home in your company."

Ilse put her apron to her eyes.

"But the Dierkhof meantime, Herr Claudius? If you only knew how I found it before on my return," she said somewhat sharply.

Heinz scratched his ear and looked shyly at his stern sister. But I flew toward him and put my arm in his.

"Heinz, naughty Heinz, why don't you congratulate me?"

"Oh, yes, princess; but I am sorry too. There yonder it's after all no haide."

I began this narrative two years after my wedding-day. The cradle stood near my writing-table and a tiny being lay among the pillows—my beautiful, fair first-born. It was for this tiny miracle, which I gaze at with ever new amazement, that I began to write my experiences. Since then a splendid brown-haired fellow with a powerful infant voice has taken his place in the green-veiled basket, and now Lenore, the only daughter of the house of Claudius, is slumbering in the same spot. I have been seven years married. I am seated in the room that formerly belonged to Charlotte. The dark curtains have vanished—it is sunny around me; bouquets of roses, embroidered and painted, are scattered everywhere, on carpets, curtains, and walls, and the window-sills are perfect masses of flowers. Lenore is asleep, her tiny fist pressed against her cheek. It is so still I can hear a fly buzz—so I close at last!

The door opens all at once, and there they come, the two scions of the house of Claudius.

"But, mamma, you are writing too long," cries out the fair-haired one reproachfully. "We want to eat sour milk in the garden. Aunt Fliedner is in the bower already, and we have fetched grandpapa too."

I see the tremulous delight in his face. He is shooting up rapidly; but, oh, how will it be about the authority when once he has shot up above his tiny mother's head? The little brown fellow, however, raises himself on his tip-toes, lays a cord as thick as my finger and a stout willow right across my manuscript, and begs in his deep, honest voice:

"Mamma, make me a whip!"

"Go meanwhile to the garden," I say, while I labored to put together the almost impossible whip. "I must first write something to Aunt Charlotte."

"From Paul too?"

On my assenting they both ran off again downstairs.

The very day of my return from the haide Charlotte left the Claudius house to enter a school, and a short time

after young Helldorf went to England. He had asked for Charlotte's hand and been refused. She confessed to me in writing that she had treated him too badly in her arrogance, and now that she had fallen from her imaginary height she would still less yield to her inclination. We did not allow her to take any situation when once she had finished her studies. At our request she returned to the Claudius house—a passionately loving aunt to our children. Helldorf's name never crossed her lips, although she, as well as we all, had much intercourse with his brother's family. Then came the war of '66. Max Helldorf was called out and severely wounded at Königgrätz. An hour after his brother, looking pale as death, had brought the intelligence to our house, Charlotte came into my room dressed in traveling costume.

"I am going as a deaconess, Lenore," she said decidedly. "Tell uncle my intention. I cannot do otherwise."

Claudius was away. I let her go with delight. Four weeks later she wrote us a long, happy letter, signed "Charlotte Helldorf." The field-chaplain had united the patient and his faithful nurse. The youthful pair are now living at Dorotheenthal, and since "little Paul" opened his great eyes Charlotte cannot imagine why mankind, who all enter life on the same footing, should trouble themselves by entering into disputes arising only from pride or wrong feeling.

Ah, now I hear a firm tread on the stairs. I write on and pretend I don't hear him coming—the man who spoils me more than he can answer for. I always laugh at him, when he takes me up in his arms and calls out to my father, "She is the oldest and least sensible of my children." And my father nods with his absent smile. He is still very absent, my good papa! but he is tenderly cared for by us, and his latest work has made a *furore* in the world of learning. Perhaps his grandchildren have had a hand in that. They are allowed to rummage about in the now restored library as much as they please, to climb upon his knees even while he is writing. His position at court is pleasanter than ever and the princess often visits at our house; but a thick curtain hangs over Lothar's portrait and the little door in the Carolinenlust is built up.

The tall, still slight man has just entered and is bending over the cradle, examining his little daughter.

“It is extraordinary how like you that child is, Lenore!”

I spring up proudly, for he says it with an enchanted gaze. Away with the pen and the manuscript! You have no colors to paint the sunshine of joy on the forehead of the “haide princess.”

THE END.

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